



TOTAL
STEWARDSHIP

A FUTURE FULL of HOPE

“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

JEREMIAH 29:11



CATHOLIC
FOUNDATION
OF SOUTH LOUISIANA

DEVOTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

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DEVOTIONAL SUPPLEMENT

Introductory Comments and Suggestions

In keeping with an anniversary commitment to youth, family, vocations and the visionary future of a healthy Catholic Church, this year's Devotional Supplement draws heavily from the daily experiences and personal stories of parishioners whose Catholic faith is largely defined by their interactions with family and friends.

The Total Stewardship curriculum inspires a renewed commitment in three areas of emphasis—Prayer, Ministry and Finance—and those efforts typically involve occasional seasons of focused instruction, but healthy stewardship is more: It is a way of living. We encourage you to teach stewardship principles throughout the year, asking parishioners to consider their commitments at all times.

The devotional pieces that follow in this section of your binder curriculum are the product of that philosophy. Use them in your weekly bulletins, include them in weekly emails, or simply add them to the material you use to write homilies and instructional messages for staff and laity throughout the seasons of the liturgical year. For your convenience, and beginning with All Saints, the studies are arranged in exactly that fashion—five dozen devotional articles that follow the liturgical calendar, each one accompanied by a related quote from the saints.

Each of the 60 devotional articles is one of a series designed for a particular time of year, but please use them in whatever ways best serve the needs of your parish. As always, we pray this set of additional resources encourages you to keep your binder of new stewardship materials close at hand. We pray you find it helpful, and God blesses your efforts.

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
All Saints to Advent

1 One of Four

The
Calendar
and the
Liturgical
Season

1 of 60
Total Articles

◆
1 of 4 From
"all saints
to advent

From Daniel, Chapter 12:1-3

"Like Shining Stars"

"At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since the nation began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, others to reproach and everlasting disgrace. But those with insight shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

A passage of Scripture that addresses "a time unsurpassed in distress since the nation began" doesn't seem an introduction to visionary encouragement. The twelfth chapter of Daniel, however, includes a wonderful passage of hope to those who have served and lived for the Lord. Every faithful parishioner experiences days when the value and importance of ministry service is in question. Well, whenever you feel that your efforts are unappreciated, that your work has gone unnoticed, remember you "will shine like stars forever and ever."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"Faith is a sure foretaste, by the exercise of the will, of truth that is not yet manifested."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

Scripture,
Article Title,
and Article
Text

A Quote
from the
Saints
of the
Church

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
All Saints to Advent

1 One of Four

From Daniel, Chapter 12:1-3

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A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
All Saints to Advent

2 Two of Four

From the Psalms, Chapter 16:5, 8-11

“Always Ready to Listen”

“Lord, my allotted portion and my cup, you have made my destiny secure. I keep the Lord always before me; with him at my right hand, I shall never be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let your devout one see the pit. You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.”

Elizabeth was getting ready for bed, the whole time thinking her husband was unusually late, yet to return from a committee meeting at church. The phone rang, and—from a number she didn’t recognize—a spokesperson from a local hospital said she needed to get to the emergency room as quickly as possible. On his way home, James had been in an accident and was already in surgery. It was difficult to recall the details of so awful a message, and she left home, not fully aware of her husband’s condition. In the days that followed, God’s merciful provision and the care of a talented trauma team saw James restored, now able to work again and drive himself after a yearlong recovery. “I keep the Lord always before me,” she prayed. “With him, I shall never be shaken.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Whoever is wakeful and prayerful in the night, in this visible darkness he is surrounded by an invisible light.”

St. Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306-373)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
All Saints to Advent

3 Three of Four

From Hebrews, Chapter 9:24-28

“We Eagerly Await His Coming”

One recent political candidate promised his children he'd buy them a family pet were he to win a demanding election, one way to reward them for sacrifices of time and energy the entire family had shared. The promise excited the youngsters, and they eagerly waited for the day their parents would accompany them on their pet shop purchase. If we can relate, then surely, we can be awed by the prophetic promise of the coming King of Glory. Young girls and boys leave pet stores with dogs, cats and other new family additions every day. Jesus came “once to take away the sins of many,” and he will return for “those who eagerly await him.”

“For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away the sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Jesus Christ is my all-in-all. He is my treasure, my life, my bliss, my capitol, my temple, my altar, and nothing can separate me from him.”

St. Macra (Died c. 297)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
All Saints to Advent

4 Four of Four

From the Psalms, Chapter 100:4-5

“The Familiar in the Unknown”

“Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name; good indeed is the Lord, his mercy endures forever, his faithfulness lasts through every generation.”

One small Christian group member starts every day with a cup of the same type of “coffee milk” her grandmother made for her during quiet summers spent on the front porch of Grandmom’s home by a rural lake. For some things, we never tire. That cup of weak coffee—more warm milk than anything—helps to start each day of quiet reflection and prayer, inviting God’s guidance in the unknown developments of each day through the presence of the familiar. The routine means warmth and comfort, and often conjures stories of a loving grandmother and a modest lake front home. Those memories are now invested in that study group member’s own children and grandchildren. They may never fully understand the value of each story, but they grasp the importance of starting days in praise, asking for guidance as they walk with God in their lives—the familiar in the unfamiliar.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“To those who seek God’s kingdom and righteousness, he promises that all things shall be added. For since God possesses all things, those who possess God will lack nothing if they do not lack God himself.”

St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
The Advent Season

5 One of Six

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2:46-52

“The Cry of the Loving”

“After three days his parents found Jesus in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”

The little boy got tired of playing the outside games with his friends, because he was the youngest, the smallest and the slowest, and the one they made the butt of jokes. During a game of Hide-and-Seek, he would show them how smart he was, hiding where they’d never find him. He’d hide in a hydrangea bush where the granddaddy long leg spiders lived, a place everybody avoided. He hid and listened, as each friend was found. They called for him, but he remained hidden. Time passed—a lot of time passed. Finally, he heard his mother calling, and he realized he heard fear in her voice. Not what he planned, he ran to her. As an adult, he still remembers her emotional cry.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Even a little child can scatter flowers, to scent the throne room with their fragrance. That shall be my life: to scatter flowers—to miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kind word, always doing the tiniest things right, and doing it for love.”

St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
The Advent Season

6 Two of Six

From Titus, Chapter 3:4-7

“Only in Loss Do We Experience Restoration”

Time and time again, many of us have conversations with other people about the 2016 Baton Rouge-area flood. We hear from those that did not flood, and often they express a sense of guilt. They feel guilty because their lives have followed their normal course; they didn't have to deal with the loss or any of the nastiness the flood left in people's homes and lives. Our reply is always the same: We are pleased for them, grateful that they are not continuing to deal with the cleanup and reconstruction. We sense God's grace and mercy and power every day. The loss of property may have been great and hurtful, yet God's redemptive work is praiseworthy in the extreme.

“But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“God will repair what has been shattered, but not by mending it with something else. Rather, out of the old and very same material of its origin, he will impart to it an appearance of beauty pleasing to himself.”

St. Hilary of Poitiers (Died c. 368)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
The Advent Season

7 Three of Six

From Isaiah, Chapter 9:1-5

"The Shoulders of the Shepherd"

The extended family gathered around the crib, and the first-time parents struggled to take in all their comments. "Oh, look at that mouth. She has your mouth." "Your eyes. He has your mother's eyes." Holding their precious child, they feel relief, joy, fear, wonderment, awe—the many emotions new parents experience. "She'll be like you. She'll be smart, and kind, and friendly, or creative. He will be a natural leader." But never, "He will be the prince of peace." No, that role was for one, the only One. Perhaps it's appropriate to breathe a sigh of relief. There was only One born to shoulder all that we cannot.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, the rod of their taskmaster, you have smashed, as on the day of Midian. For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for fire. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"When once I had seen the great beauty of the Lord, I saw no one by comparison on whom my thoughts wished to dwell."

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
The Advent Season

8 Four of Six

From Romans, Chapter 10:13-18

"Stand and Speak"

"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!' But not everyone has heeded the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord who has believed what was heard from us?' Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did, for 'Their voice has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'"

What is your greatest fear? Is it a fear of heights, a fear of the dark, or a fear of cats, sharks, spiders or snakes? For many of your peers, speaking in public causes the greatest unease. Anxiety. Cold sweats. Rapid heartbeat. Lost sleep. Aren't we grateful that our spiritual leaders are willing to speak to us each week? Otherwise, how would we know the spiritual truths that define us? "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" They bring "good news." Let's rejoice in their faithfulness. We listen, believing "what is heard comes through the word of Christ."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The true style of oratory, and the most difficult to achieve, is that which seems simple and easy, and leaves the listener with the impression that he could have done just as well himself. The efficacy of preaching lies in plain, natural instruction about the duties of everyman."

Blessed Dominic Barberi (1792-1849)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

Late 2018
The Advent Season

9 Five of Six

From Daniel, Chapter 5:13-14, 16-17, 23

"The Best Advance Man"

How often are we bold in speaking truth, especially if we sense a particular situation may not be headed in a direction that promotes truth or boldness? Do we really hold to the knowledge that speaking up in truth matters in God's economy? In the Scriptures, we often see God calling the faithful to speak. Thankfully, God's word is a history of his purposes, giving us knowledge and more—the comfort to know that in the lives represented in those pages, God blesses his own with boldness whenever it's needed.

"Then Daniel was brought into the presence of the king. The king asked him, 'Are you the Daniel, one of the Jewish exiles, whom my father, the king, brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you, that you have shown brilliant insight and extraordinary wisdom. I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems; now, if you are able to read the writing and tell me what it means, you shall be clothed in purple, wear a chain of gold around your neck, and be third in governing the kingdom.' Daniel answered the king: 'You may keep your gifts, or give your presents to someone else; but the writing I will read for the king, and tell you what it means. You have rebelled against the Lord of heaven. You had the vessels of this temple brought before you, so that you and your nobles, your consorts and your concubines, might drink wine from them; and you praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, that neither see nor hear nor have intelligence. But the God in whose hand is your very breath and the whole course of your life, you did not glorify.'"

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"Those who wage war against the truth are powerless to win; rather, they wound themselves, like those who kick against spikes."

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

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Late 2018
The Advent Season

10 Six of Six

From Judges, Chapter 13:2-7, 24-25a

"Delivery to Those Who Cry"

When God's people needed a prophet, a dear childless woman named Hannah was blessed with a son named Samuel. When God's people needed a king, a faithful immigrant named Ruth was blessed with a child whose grandson was named David. In the time of the judges, the people needed a deliverer, and God heard the prayer of Manoah's barren wife and sent the nation a strong judge named Samson. Then, even as the nation of Israel cried out to God for a redeemer, the Father heard and sent angels to foretell of the birth of the Messiah through a faithful virgin.

"There was a certain man from Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children. An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her: Though you are barren and have had no children, you will conceive and bear a son. Now, then, be careful to drink no wine or beer and to eat nothing unclean, for you will conceive and bear a son. No razor shall touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite for God from the womb. It is he who will begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines. The woman went and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me; he had the appearance of an angel of God, fearsome indeed. I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will conceive and bear a son. So drink no wine or beer, and eat nothing unclean. For the boy shall be a Nazirite for God from the womb, until the day of his death.' The woman bore a son and named him Samson, and when the boy grew up the Lord blessed him. The spirit of the Lord came upon him."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"Human salvation demands the divine disclosure of truths surpassing reason."

St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

11 One of Eight

From 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12:4-11

"Gifts for the Good of Others"

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes."

Talent is a wonderful blessing. Watch a mother teach a small child how to tie his or her shoes—in a single evening. Listen to a pastor teach a children's lesson, then address a roomful of adults, enlivening the same material with equal skill. Observe a furniture maker breathe life into a stack of wood, converting rough supplies into a finished side table. A list of examples—true in each of our parish families—is endless. God has granted talents, gifts and abilities to bless the communities we share, each one "given for some benefit."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"I do not lend. I give. Hasn't the good God been the first to give to me?"

St. Jean Vianney (1786-1859)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

12 Two of Eight

From Titus, Chapter 1:1-5

“Pour in the Essentials”

“Paul, a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God’s chosen ones and the recognition of religious truth, in the hope of eternal life that God, who does not lie, promised before time began, who indeed at the proper time revealed his word in the proclamation with which I was entrusted by the command of God our savior, to Titus, my true child in our common faith: grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our savior.”

Just like St. Timothy, Titus was Paul’s spiritual son in the faith. He referred to him as “my true child in our common faith,” and he poured the essential tenets of ministry into the heart of the young man. The basics are essential. Every teenager who learns to drive understands there is a general process in play. Beginning with driver’s education, young adults complete instruction and driving experience modules, all the while following parents’ or guardians’ guidance regarding the costs of preparation, care of a vehicle and insurance. Long before a teenager can drive alone, others have invested heavily, helping to make it happen, “for the sake” of someone else.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“All who undertake to teach must be endowed with deep love, the greatest patience and, most of all, profound humility. The Lord will find them worthy to become fellow workers with him in the cause of truth.”

St. Joseph of Calasanza (1556-1648)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

13 Three of Eight

From 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12:12-20

“Every Part a Vital Ingredient”

For the Stark family, every Thanksgiving celebration meant a wonderful time of family fellowship, expressions of gratitude and great food. Everyone looked forward to dessert, especially a slice of Mom’s pumpkin pie. There was just something special about Mom’s recipe, and her eldest daughter Janet used the recipe to make the family favorite this past year. With the first bite, it was clear something was amiss. Her relatives averted their eyes, a few grinned, the youngest began to chuckle. They couldn’t get it down. Turns out, Janet had accidentally inverted the amounts of flour and sugar called for, making the pie thick, mealy and bland. Every ingredient in a favorite recipe is vital, and the amounts prescribed were key. Every part matters.

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, “Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, “Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“There is nothing small in the service of God.”

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

14 Four of Eight

From the Psalms, Chapter 149:1-6, 9

“With Praise in Our Mouths”

“Hallelujah! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. Let Israel be glad in its maker, the people of Zion rejoice in their king. Let them praise his name in dance, make music with tambourine and lyre. For the Lord takes delight in his people, honors the poor with victory. Let the faithful rejoice in their glory, cry out for joy on their couches, with the praise of God in their mouths, and a two-edged sword in their hands, to execute the judgments decreed for them—such is the glory of all God’s faithful. Hallelujah!”

After the loss of her husband to cancer, one single mother of two pre-teens struggled to provide for the three of them. She had a wonderful support group and knew her loving Heavenly Father, so she met life’s challenges with joyful courage. After she completed her second shift, she often watched HGTV and looked through decorating books she checked out from the local library. She could only dream of providing a home like those typically portrayed. One year, on a lark, she entered a televised contest with a dream home as the grand prize. The night of the contest reveal, she heard a knock on her door, amazed to realize she had won. She danced and honored God with his praise in her mouth.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“All our life is like a celebration for us; we are convinced, in fact, that God is always everywhere. We work while singing. We sail while reciting hymns. We accomplish all other occupations of life while praying.”

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

15 Five of Eight

From the Psalms, Chapter 100:1-3

“After All, We Belong”

“A psalm of thanksgiving: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful song. Know that the Lord is God; he made us, we belong to him, we are his people, and the flock he shepherds.”

“We are his people.” It’s been said that we are Catholic because Momma was Catholic. Isn’t that often true. “We are his people, Catholic parishioners largely because God blessed us with parents, grandparents or others who directed us to the Church while we were too young to make such a decision on our own. Much like the celebrities profiled in “Finding Your Roots,” we discover the reasons for establishing paths of faith when we take time to listen to all those who’ve gone before—an aunt who taught catechism classes, an uncle who served the church as a priest, a grandmother who prayed for family and friends every day, and a parent who added worship and ministry to home and work, making sure we knew the value of serving with gladness.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Happiness is found in the home where God is loved and honored, where each one loves, and helps, and cares for the others.”

St. Theophane Venard (1829-1861)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

16 Six of Eight

From Genesis, Chapter 1:14-19

“A Peak at the Beginning”

Witnessing a solar eclipse is an unforgettable experience. Bisecting the continent in the middle of the day, on August 21, 2017 the sun darkened, the temperature dropped, birds ceased to sing, and people smiled—some even weeping—as they gazed at the sky with their funny glasses. It was wonderful. It was amazing. In the span of minutes, sky gazers experienced God’s original design—night and day—in brief, the Creator permitting his Creation the opportunity to view his power and purposes grounded at the beginning of it all.

“Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the seasons, the days and the years, and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“If there is anyone who is not enlightened by this sublime magnificence of created things, he is blind. If there is anyone who, seeing all these works of God, does not praise him, he is dumb. If there is anyone who, from so many signs, cannot perceive God, that man is foolish.”

St. Bonaventure (1221-1274)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

17 Seven of Eight

From Jeremiah, Chapter 17:5-8

“An Extension of Trust in God”

For contemporary youthworkers, trust exercises are a regular part of many special events, an excellent way to teach teens the importance of trusting God. One of the more popular exercises requires a teen to climb an eight-foot ladder, standing on a rung even with the outstretched arms of his or her peers. Free falling while facing the ladder, arms crossed and legs stiff, the climber is altogether vulnerable. Eight peers or so, with their arms interlocked, stand ready to catch their falling friend. They believe they'll catch their friend, and that friend trusts they will.

“Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a barren bush in the wasteland that enjoys no change of season, but stands in lava beds in the wilderness, a land, salty and uninhabited. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord; the Lord will be their trust. They are like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“We shall steer safely through every storm, as long as our heart is right, our intention fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed in God.”

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

Advent to Lent

18 Eight of Eight

From Hebrews, Chapter 11:32-40

“Too Good for Us”

“She’s too good for him.” “He needs to find someone else. He’s too good for her.” We’ve thought it. Maybe said it. On reflection, such a perspective seems cruel, even if they’re seated in a desire concerning what’s best for others. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews would argue there’s at least one appropriate place for the point-of-view: when we consider the martyred faithful throughout Church history and faithful biblical characters that established the bar for them and for us.

“What more shall I say? I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises; they closed the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. Women received back their dead through resurrection. Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword’s point; they went about in skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth. Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“No one is a martyr for a conclusion. No one is a martyr for an opinion. It is faith that makes martyrs.”

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)

A Year of Weekly Bulletin Articles

2019

The Lenten Season

19 One of Six

From the Psalms, Chapter 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19

“I Am Sorry, Lord”

“Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me. A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit. Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit. For you do not desire sacrifice or I would give it; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.”

Parents work hard to train their children, teaching them about life and pointing out the locations of landmines they can expect to encounter. Much of that instruction is based on experience. The Scriptures tell us that children who know how to live righteous lives, even if they detour from the path for a season, carry knowledge of right living all along their journeys through life. King David knew to ask for forgiveness and restoration, his prayer was no different from anyone seeking God’s mercy today, especially young boys and girls who long for their parents’ compassion and approval.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“No mother could snatch her child from a burning building more swiftly than God is constrained to succor a penitent soul.”

Blessed Henry Suso (c. 1295-1365)

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The Lenten Season

20 Two of Six

From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7:5-12

“What’s Best for One”

“You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.”

A group of hard-working women from a local parish appeared at the door of a young mother to help clean her home after an extended stay in the hospital. “Things are a total mess,” she told her church friends. That wasn’t an understatement. The ‘happy helpers’ worked all day getting the house back in order: washing dishes; washing multiple loads of clothes; picking up toys, books, and shoes; dusting and vacuuming; even cooking a week’s worth of meals and storing them in the family refrigerator and freezer. They loved their wounded friend and couldn’t imagine doing anything but good for her. As they headed home, one said, “Now it’s time to get down to business in my own home!”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“What a great favor God does to those whom he places in the company of good people!”

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

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The Lenten Season

21 Three of Six

From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5:43-48

“A Hard Rain Really Is Going to Fall”

Floods, fires, tornadoes, and damaging winds. Destruction, disaster, and devastation. Few of us escape the impact of a catastrophe, whether directly or indirectly. Experience affirms the truth of the Bible. God “causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” A storm readily wreaks havoc on the parish church, a parish’s neighbors who attend other churches, and those who choose not to attend worship services of any kind. How appropriate that we choose to extend ministry aid to all of our neighbors. The sun shines on all, and it takes all to help in any real recovery.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Seeing God means following him wherever he might lead.”

St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c. 395)

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The Lenten Season

22 Four of Six

From Daniel, Chapter 9:4-10

"The Shame of Blatant Sin"

"I prayed to the Lord, my God, and confessed, 'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, you who keep your covenant and show mercy toward those who love you and keep your commandments and your precepts! We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and turned from your commandments and your laws. We have not obeyed your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our ancestors, and all the people of the land. Justice, O Lord, is on your side; we are shamefaced even to this day: the men of Judah, the residents of Jerusalem, and all Israel, near and far, in all the lands to which you have scattered them because of their treachery toward you. O Lord, we are ashamed, like our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, for having sinned against you.' But to the Lord, our God, belong compassion and forgiveness, though we rebelled against him and did not hear the voice of the Lord, our God, by walking in his laws given through his servants the prophets."

If you've stood in line at a local grocery store, you've likely viewed the fruit of the strong-willed child—clamoring for a last-second purchase of a toy or piece of candy, dancing in and out of the line, throwing a fit or simply throwing things in general. Were you ever viewed as strong-willed? Are you still? From the Almighty's perspective, aren't we all. Sure. To live based on our personal preferences can overshadow God's will for us, what he knows is best. Thankfully, in his mercy, God forgives us and lovingly restores us after repeated mistakes, childish behavior and shallow promises to change.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"Our sins are nothing but a grain of sand alongside the great mountain of the mercy of God."

St. Jean Vianney (1786-1859)

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The Lenten Season

23 Five of Six

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 16:19-20, 24-28, 31

“Please, Listen to This!”

Some hazards leave us breathless, quaking in our boots and unable to focus. With a desire to warn those we care about, others direct us to an electronics store and the purchase of a microphone and loud speaker. As Jesus frequently said, “We have ears to hear and eyes to see the truth of God’s word, as it often appears right in front of us. Pointing a finger at someone else never removes our own responsibility to listen, to read, and to respond in obedience.

“‘There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’ Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.’ He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.’ Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“We ought not, as soon as we leave church, to plunge into business unsuited to church, but as soon as we get home, we should take the Scriptures into our hands, and call other members of our families to join us in putting together what we have heard.”

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

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The Lenten Season

24 Six of Six

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 13:1-9

“So, What Did He Mean?”

“At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. He said to them in reply, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!’ And he told them this parable: ‘There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil? He said to him in reply, Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”

The main characters in a recent film entitled “Words and Pictures,” one a writer and the other a painter, wrestle with the inherent value in each of their artistic crafts. Their exchanges are fruitful. Words paint pictures, and images promote emotional engagement expressed in language. Jesus, the great Teacher, was the Master, often choosing to teach in parables. He painted word pictures for us that are challenging and unforgettable.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“It is chiefly by asking questions and in provoking explanations that the master must open the mind of the pupil, make him work, and use his thinking powers, form his judgment, and make him find out for himself the answer.”

St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle (1651-1719)

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Easter to Pentecost

25 One of Twelve

From the Psalms, Chapter 16:1-2, 5, 7-11

“Watching Over Us”

Every time we leave to go on a trip, we stop and pray before we leave the driveway. We ask for God’s protection in our travel and invite him to watch over all he’s entrusted to us and any family members that stay behind. We ask his watch care for us and for those on the road with us, that all would reach their destinations. We recognize that our loving God does this even if we fail to ask. He lovingly holds us in his hands.

“Keep me safe, O God; in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, you are my only good. Lord, my allotted portion and my cup, you have made my destiny secure. I bless the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart exhorts me. I keep the Lord always before me; with him at my right hand, I shall never be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let your devout one see the pit. You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Don’t doubt but that God keeps you in his divine arms and that the time will come when he will teach you his most holy will.”

St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775)

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Easter to Pentecost

26 Two of Twelve

From the Psalms, Chapter 2:1-9

“Ask”

Ask. Such a simple thing. The essential salesperson’s tool, and the fundamental descriptor for a successful fundraiser. Whatever else you do, make “the ask.” Don’t forget to ask. It’s no less true in our spiritual lives, as we pray. Don’t forget to ask. God permits us the chance to see him at work when we ask, when we unburden ourselves on our knees, when we convey our inner thoughts, hurts, and desires. He answers our requests and blesses us, even though we sometimes must wait.

“Why do the nations protest, and the peoples conspire in vain? Kings on earth rise up and princes plot together against the Lord and against his anointed one: ‘Let us break their shackles and cast off their chains from us!’ The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord derides them, then he speaks to them in his anger, in his wrath he terrifies them: ‘I myself have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.’ I will proclaim the decree of the Lord, he said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask it of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and, as your possession, the ends of the earth. With an iron rod you will shepherd them, like a potter’s vessel you will shatter them.’”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Prayer is a wine that makes glad the heart of men.”

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

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Easter to Pentecost

27 Three of Twelve

From the Psalms, Chapter 42:2-3 and Chapter 43:3-4

“My Soul Longs for Refreshment”

The road trip to visit the kids’ grandparents lasted forever. Everyone was worn out. The usual road games had passed, the only DVD had played twice, and lunchboxes and snack packs were empty. Mom, who never turns on music in the car, decided that might be an apt distraction. She was right. The music began up tempo, she sang along, then so did everyone else. Before the family knew it, the last two hours passed—their voices worn out and their cheeks sore from laughing with joy.

“As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God? Send your light and your fidelity, that they may be my guide; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place of your dwelling, that I may come to the altar of God, to God, my joy, my delight. Then I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“What are God’s servants but his minstrels, who must inspire the hearts of men and stir them to spiritual joy!”

St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226)

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Easter to Pentecost

28 Four of Twelve

From the Psalms, Chapter 122:1-5

"I Want to Go"

The oldest member of the family remembers worship before Vatican Two. Though grateful for the personal engagement that typifies the more-contemporary Mass, she frequently mentions what defines meaningful worship to her, whether in Latin or cultural language. She speaks of the reverence long a hallmark of Catholic worship—an overwhelming air of reflective quiet, her head covered, and her head bowed. She loves to attend Mass.

"I rejoiced when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem, built as a city, walled round about. There the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as it was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. There are the thrones of justice, the thrones of the house of David."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The whole sanctuary and the space before the altar is filled with the heavenly powers come to honor him who is present on the altar."

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

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Easter to Pentecost

29 Five of Twelve

From the Psalms, Chapter 57:8-12

“Awake My Soul, and Sing”

“My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and chant praise. Awake, my soul; awake, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn. I will praise you among the peoples, Lord; I will chant your praise among the nations. For your mercy towers to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Exalt yourself over the heavens, God; may your glory appear above all the earth.”

Spring in the deep South is incredibly beautiful. When youngsters, could we possibly have envisioned a natural set of crayons with shades of green, dozens deep? The azaleas bloom in pink and peach, the songbirds call and fly in haste to complete their nests. Homeowners raise their windows, and drivers lower theirs. All of creation seems enraptured with praise of the Creator for all he has done—once again.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Listen to the sermon preached to you by the flowers, the trees, the shrubs, the sky, and the whole world. Notice how they preach to you a sermon full of love, of praise to God, and how they invite you to glorify the sublimity of that sovereign Artist who has given them being.”

St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775)

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Easter to Pentecost

30 Six of Twelve

From Exodus, Chapter 15:1-6, 17-18

“Our Strength and Our Help”

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: I will sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot he has cast into the sea. My strength and my refuge is the Lord, and he has become my savior. This is my God, I praise him; the God of my father, I extol him. The Lord is a warrior, Lord is his name! Pharaoh’s chariots and army he hurled into the sea; the elite of his officers were drowned in the Red Sea. The flood waters covered them, they sank into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, magnificent in power, your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. You brought them in, you planted them on the mountain that is your own—the place you made the base of your throne, Lord, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established. May the Lord reign forever and ever!”

“My strength and my refuge is the Lord.” Spellcheck programs want us to change the verb “is” to “are.” After all, “strength” and “refuge” are distinctive terms, separate, and worthy of being seen as plural when combined. Right? No, Moses connected the two. God was Moses’ strength, providing him the ability to lead the children of Israel up to and through the Red Sea. God was also Moses’ refuge, protecting the nation as they passed through, though the Sea then captured the army of Pharaoh. God was both strength and refuge, just as Jesus is Lord and Savior, Redeemer and Friend, Son of God and Son of Man. God alone is worthy of our worship.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Therefore, with mind entire, faith firm, courage undaunted, love thorough, let us be ready for whatever God wills.”

St. Bede the Venerable (c. 673-735)

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Easter to Pentecost

31 Seven of Twelve

From the Gospel of John, Chapter 21:2-7a, 10-11a, 12-14

“Throw Some More Fish on the Barbie”

“Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We also will come with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have you caught anything to eat?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ So he said to them, ‘Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.’ So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you just caught.’ So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Jesus said to them, ‘Come, have breakfast.’ Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.”

Jesus appeared to the disciples multiple times after the Resurrection. It wasn’t until after the Ascension, though, that they exhibited a sense of clarity about their mission. Between the two foundational events, they went fishing, but were frustrated by failure. Watching them from the beach, Jesus called out, encouraging them to try again. They did, and their net filled. As they worked their way back to shore, Jesus prepared breakfast. Jesus cooked breakfast, a wonderful picture of his care and concern. Not only did he provide the food, but he cooked it up for them.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Of God, we cannot say all that ought to be said. In those matters that concern God, to confess our ignorance is already great knowledge.”

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386)

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Easter to Pentecost

32 Eight of Twelve

From the Gospel of John, Chapter 15:9-17

“He Really Did Die for Us”

Perhaps you’ve heard this one: A man dialed a wrong number and got the following recording: “I am not available right now, but I thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes.” We laugh a bit uncomfortably because the perspective is too familiar. If you followed the Lord’s example, you’d create a message the individual wouldn’t understand. “It is not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” “I define friendship this way: I’m willing to die for you.”

“‘As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.’”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“The cross is the gift God makes to his friends.”

St. Jean Vianney (1786-1859)

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Easter to Pentecost

33 Nine of Twelve

From Acts, Chapter 2:1-11

"I Hear What You're Saying!"

"How many languages do you speak?" the instructor asked his small study group. With no ability to speak French, Spanish or anything else, his students even joked about their struggles with English. He then directed them to the second chapter of Acts and the remarkable testimony of Pentecost. "How does each of us hear them in his own native language?" How? Because God loved the Parthians and the Medes, just as he did the Jews. He loved the inhabitants of Egypt and Libya just as he did the Greeks. A few minutes a day is all it would take to learn the basics of another language. As God's Church, don't we love others enough to do that, too?

"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, 'Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.'"

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The Church and the world have need of a new Pentecost, a second Pentecost, a priestly Pentecost, an interior Pentecost."

Venerable Concepcion Cabrera de Armida (1862-1937)

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Easter to Pentecost

34 Ten of Twelve

From Acts, Chapter 15:1-2, 3a-8

"Let's Debate It"

"Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved.' Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and presbyters about this question. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church. But some from the party of the Pharisees who had become believers stood up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Mosaic law.' The apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter. After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them, 'My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the Holy Spirit just as he did us.'"

"You're entitled to your opinion." A celebration of individualism, it is a mantra for our times. When charting the future course of a lasting institution, it's terribly unhelpful. What about God's opinion? Do you agree with your neighbor? Better yet, do you agree with the Almighty? In the first century, Jewish leaders believed new converts had to approach the new religion of Christianity by taking on Jewish customs they'd lived with all of their lives. To their credit, early Church leaders made sure to promote "much debate" on the matter. To his credit, Peter affirmed God's purposes. Gentiles had said "Yes" to Jesus too. They followed a different path to the same destination—Jews and Gentiles alike trusted Jesus as Lord. Though framed by the Jewish faith, of course, because the position posited by Peter, Paul and Barnabas held the day, Christianity has remained distinctive.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"He who has undertaken the governing of souls must prepare himself to render to God an account of them."

St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-c. 547)

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2019

Easter to Pentecost

35 Eleven of Twelve

From 1 Peter, Chapter 5:8-11

"Be Vigilant"

Special events have long been a staple of any parish's youth program: weekend retreats, mission efforts, concerts, and summer camp weeks. One youth minister remembers what a parent sponsor called "the summer camp from Hell." (Terrible description, right?) Well, that parent drove a van to and from the closest hospital emergency room just as the youthworker had: broken bones, allergic reactions to poison ivy and insect bites, lost inhalers, and more. In God's grace, even those days were as life-defining and life-affirming as any those students had ever experienced. A spiritual battle wages, at times most obvious when the stakes are the highest.

"Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ Jesus will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little. To him be dominion forever. Amen."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The Devil's snare doesn't catch you unless you're already nibbling on the Devil's bait."

St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397)

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2019

Easter to Pentecost

36 Twelve of Twelve

From Acts, Chapter 16:11-15

“The Flesh and the Spirit”

“We set sail from Troas, making a straight run for Samothrace, and on the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, a leading city in that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We spent some time in that city. On the sabbath we went outside the city gate along the river where we thought there would be a place of prayer. We sat and spoke with the women who had gathered there. One of them, a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, from the city of Thyatira, a worshiper of God, listened, and the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying. After she and her household had been baptized, she offered us an invitation, ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home,’ and she prevailed on us.”

Do your seniors ever meet in each other’s homes? What about your small Christian groups? Do they occasionally meet for study in neighborhood homes? And, what of your youth? For generations, young people have met in their families’ homes, or in residences belonging to youth sponsors, mentors and friends of a parish’s youth program. As we find when reading from Acts, chapter 16, it’s a tradition that dates to the first century and the earliest days of the Christian Church. Lydia and her friends gathered “along the river” for prayer and reflection. It was the most natural thing in the world for her to host Paul and others, moving their meeting into her home.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Happy is the one who becomes a fountain of voices—all of them praising God in all things.”

St. Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306-373)

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2019

The Summer Season

37 One of Fourteen

From 2 Corinthians, Chapters 3:15—4:1, 3-6

“Flicking the Switch”

“To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. And even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ.”

We call them “light bulb moments,” or “aha moments.” Perhaps the apostles called them “moments when the veil was lifted.” What we mean is that we finally understand some key principle, we finally get it. And “it” is incredibly significant when we’re talking about some new level of understanding regarding our Catholic faith or a greater appreciation for the work done on our behalf by Jesus Christ our Savior. We now no longer walk through life through our own strength. Jesus is with us always.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“It is true that the voice of God, having once penetrated the heart, becomes strong as the tempest and loud as the thunder.”

St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556)

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2019

The Summer Season

38 Two of Fourteen

From 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4:7-15

“Struck Down, but Not Out”

“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since, then, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we too believe and therefore speak, knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us with you in his presence. Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God.”

The faithful family of five, new to the parish, had experienced one vexing situation after another. The husband lost the job he had moved his family to the city to take. That meant the loss of insurance and other benefits, too. Child number three was a newborn and generally unhappy. They often felt alone. Though they’d attended Mass on occasion, they hadn’t really had the opportunity to settle into their new neighborhood well. Mom’s maternal grandmother—someone she saw as a spiritual mentor—had just died, and the Dad’s father had been given six weeks to live. To top it off, while trying to make friends, the family attended a block party where a neighbor’s dog attacked the oldest son. Struggling for a lifeline, their priest directed them to 2 Corinthians, chapter 4. Maybe they could find themselves at home after all.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Whatever good or evil befalls you, be confident that God will convert it all to your good.”

St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641)

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From 2 Corinthians, Chapter 6:2b-10

“Like the Saints of Old”

Mature couples who’ve made it through life, having fostered a strong commitment to their faith, are a source of true strength and wisdom. I’m a sap for their stories and pray to grow into someone just like them. Time after time, we hear about their earliest years together. They say, “We didn’t have very much, but we were so happy.” Or, “those first few years were a challenge, but we were surrounded by good friends, were part of a great church, and were the happiest we’ve ever been.” It’s in times like those we learn to depend on God’s mercy and grace. Those who’ve gone before, just like the saints of the Church, help show us the way.

“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We cause no one to stumble in anything, in order that no fault may be found with our ministry; on the contrary, in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left; through glory and dishonor, insult and praise. We are treated as deceivers and yet are truthful; as unrecognized and yet acknowledged; as dying and behold we live; as chastised and yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“The whole science of the saints consists in knowing and following the will of God.”

St. Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636)

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From 2 Corinthians, Chapter 9:6-11

“Give Generously, Cheerfully and Often”

“Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: ‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You are being enriched in every way for all generosity, which through us produces thanksgiving to God.”

As a young teen, Carley frustrated her mother no end. Her mother often found herself in the carpool line, waiting for her daughter and frustrated as one parent after another left with child in tow. More than once, she had to pull over and search for Carley, most often finding her listening to one of her friends, deep in conversation. Now, years later, her daughter a Christian counselor, Mom has realized what was going on most of the time. Carley wasn’t being intentionally disobedient or insensitive. She gave of herself to help others, to be available, carrying the burdens that plagued her peers, and giving whatever she had—even if all she had to offer was time and a listening ear. Mom says, “She’s that same person today, the most beautiful person inside and out.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“A great crown is laid up for you. Don’t barter away a great dignity for a petty pleasure.”

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386)

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From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 6:5-6, 16-18

“Keeping It Quiet”

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.’”

Doing for others can be such a kick, and doing for others without them knowing who is responsible is like giving a gift without an enclosure card. We’ve all read stories about “paying it forward.” We’ve heard of people in a fast food line paying for those in the line behind them, a police officer who bought shoes for a homeless man, or maybe a teenager who shoveled the walkway of an elderly couple. Blessing others is a blessing, but there’s an added private bonus when it’s done in private. The same with prayer: Spend some time with the Father, just you and the One who gave you life.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Remember that God prefers the poverty of our hearts to the most sublime thoughts borrowed from others.”

St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868)

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From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7:15-20

“Fruit, Not Thorns”

A young couple, recently relocated to Louisiana, decided it was time to plant some locally-grown trees in their new yard. Knowing very little about either one, they planted two fruit trees, a satsuma and a kumquat. In year two, the kumquat started producing, but the satsuma remained free of fruit. The next year, the kumquat tree was loaded, but the satsuma couldn't seem to produce a single piece of fruit. In the fourth year, they snapped a picture, sent it to the nursery and asked for help. Why had the satsuma—an otherwise healthy-looking tree—failed to produce? The nursery owner identified the problem right away, offering a lesson regarding strong root systems and thorny stalks running through the middle of the modest tree, stems she called “suckers.” “Eliminate the thorny stalks, wait a season or two, and call me back.” That return call was never needed. Both trees produce abundantly today.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“When men are slow to do good, they fast lose both faith and grace. For we find for more men who would rather believe well than do well.”

St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

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From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7:21-29

“The Matter of Foundations”

The video excerpts are horrific, and the photographs difficult to see. A mudslide in a populated area obliterates everything in its path. Large, often beautiful homes begin to slide away like doll houses, the earth underneath giving way to the rain. In a pile of debris and shattered belongings, one house after another is simply carried away.

“Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name? Then I will declare to them solemnly, I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers. Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.’ When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“People hate the truth for the sake of whatever it is they love more than the truth. They love truth when it shines warmly on them, and hate it when it rebukes them.”

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

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From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7:6, 12-14

“Do Unto Others”

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces. Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets. Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.’”

Stricken with fear and bleeding from a nasty gash on his leg, the stranger ran from the wooded area across the street into a front yard full of gathered neighbors. Blood soaked into the teenaged boy’s shoe, and he screamed he’d fallen on an axe. One Mom leaned down to calm him, while her husband tore at fabric to expose the wound and stop the bleeding. Though another neighbor called for an ambulance, one suggested no one should touch the wound, nor anything already stained with blood. “You don’t know whether or not he’s infected with something.” The father pretended not to hear, ripping the edge of his own shirt away, applying it to the large cut. “What if this were your son?” he asked. “Would you want us to just wish him well?”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Though we do not have our Lord with us in bodily presence, we have our neighbor; who for the ends of love and loving service, is as good as our Lord himself.”

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

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From the Psalms, Chapter 15:2-5

“Clear Doesn’t Mean Cruel”

Her new father-in-law told the young bride he’d always speak the truth to her and to his son. “Don’t ask me a question unless you really want to know where I stand. I’ll tell you.” At the time, that sounded just fine—almost peculiar, as if there’d be any other way to live. As years passed, she began to understand the significance of his declaration. He told the truth, but it often hurt. He could be insensitive, at times anything but gentle and caring. When her children began to feel the brunt of his approach, she challenged him. He said, “Well, you’ll never wonder where I stand.” She asked, “But, is that enough?”

“Whoever walks without blame, doing what is right, speaking truth from the heart; who does not slander with his tongue, does no harm to a friend, never defames a neighbor; who disdains the wicked, but honors those who fear the Lord; who keeps an oath despite the cost, lends no money at interest, accepts no bribe against the innocent. Whoever acts like this shall never be shaken.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“I have never succeeded when I have spoken with the faintest suspicion of hardness. One must be ever on one’s guard not to embitter the heart, if one wishes to move the mind.”

St. Vincent de Paul (c. 1580-1660)

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From the Psalms, Chapter 26:2-3, 9-12

“Mirror, Mirror”

“Mirror, Mirror on the wall . . .” You know the rest. With the right lighting anyone can look in the mirror and see every flaw. How often do we take time to examine ourselves internally, emotionally and spiritually? Are we really honest with ourselves? Do we really need adequate lighting to reveal the flaws we carry around? God, our Heavenly Father, is keenly aware of our flawed character and questionable nature, and yet every day, we awaken and try another day, knowing he knows, aware that he loves us regardless.

“Examine me, Lord, and test me; search my heart and mind. Your mercy is before my eyes; I walk guided by your faithfulness. Do not take me away with sinners, nor my life with the men of blood, in whose hands there is a plot, their right hands full of bribery. But I walk in my integrity; redeem me, be gracious to me! My foot stands on level ground; in assemblies I will bless the Lord.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“It is our part to seek, God’s to grant what we ask; ours to make a beginning, his to bring it to completion; ours to offer what we can, his to finish what we cannot.”

St. Jerome (c. 342-420)

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The Summer Season

47 Eleven of Fourteen

From the Psalms, Chapter 106:1-5

"So, Say Yes"

"Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose mercy endures forever. Who can recount the mighty deeds of the Lord, proclaim in full God's praise? Blessed those who do what is right, whose deeds are always just. Remember me, Lord, as you favor your people; come to me with your saving help, that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones, rejoice in the joy of your people, and glory with your heritage."

"Rejoice in joy." Like that we feel on an indescribably beautiful early spring day, when we watch a toddler playing on the beach with his older siblings, when we realize the great job we always wanted is the one we have, or when we take a weekend to camp out and see stars like we haven't in years. We cry, "Yes!" What swells into an endless list of joyous life experiences make us question the harshness that limits perspective. May we see life flavored with God's mercy. "His mercy endures forever."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"I have found a joy that is full, and more than full. For when heart, and mind, and soul, and all of man, are full of that joy, joy beyond measure will still remain."

St. Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109)

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From the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 8:23-27

“A Man Like No Other”

“Jesus got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ He said to them, ‘Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?’ Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, ‘What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?’”

Peter was a fisherman. His brother Andrew was a fisherman. So were the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Based on what we read near the end of John’s Gospel, several other disciples knew the Sea of Galilee just as well. However, when they experienced “a violent storm” on the sea, they were terrified, as if it had never happened to any of them before. They were equally unsettled when Jesus—peacefully asleep—awoke and “rebuked the winds and the sea,” introducing calm into the storm. “What sort of man is this?” They may have known the sea, but the waves answered to their traveling companion’s command. “What sort of man is this?” Like no other.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Jesus Christ, our salvation, the High Priest of our offerings, the Protector and Helper of our weakness. Through him we fix our gaze on the heights of heaven. In him, we see mirrored God’s pure and transcendent face.”

St. Pope Clement I (Died c. 99)

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The Summer Season

49 Thirteen of Fourteen

From Galatians, Chapter 3:26-29

“The Greater Identity”

Every summer, the Watson clan loaded up their cars and headed to the family cabin to celebrate their annual family reunion, all of them clad in identical T-shirts. For the most part, their celebrations were delightful opportunities to catch up, meet the latest arrivals, honor recent graduates, and grieve the most recent loved ones lost. One year, the oldest member of the extended family—and owner of the cabin—had passed away, and her attorney joined the group to read a letter. Humbled by her wise choice, she’d made them joint-heirs of the property—her own children and all their cousins—ensuring the value of each group’s commitment to the annual reunion for generations to come.

“For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“A child is a pledge of immortality, for he bears upon him in figure those high and eternal excellences in which the joy of heaven consists.”

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)

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The Summer Season

50 Fourteen of Fourteen

From Ephesians, Chapter 2:19-22

“Solid Walls, Sure Foundation”

Service projects, like those available to parish youth groups through organizations of which Habitat for Humanity is an established example, can be incredibly fulfilling experiences for students and their sponsors. A few minutes of training is enough for those called to clean a job site. A few minutes more can prepare teenagers to scrape and ready exterior surfaces for a coat of paint. More still is required of those who'll take brush in hand and paint. To frame a wall, install lighting fixtures, or shingle a roof, professionals will welcome assistance, but those tasks are reserved for practiced hands. All of the work takes place with a solid foundation assured. All of the work—that completed by professionals, as well as that performed by youth—is possible because of the foundation on which they all stand.

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“If you are looking for the way by which you should go, take Christ, because he himself is the way.”

St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274)

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To All Saints Day

51 One of Ten

From 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 5:1-6, 9-11

“Expectantly, We Wait”

Even when a young expectant mother is induced, an unborn child sometimes delays arrival. Some newborns come early. Some come late. Expectant is the right word. Just as the “labor pains of a pregnant woman” signal a newborn child is expected at any time, they are only strong signals. The exact time may be imminent. There remains a measure of uncertainty. Jesus will return to us, just as he was born in Bethlehem—at God’s appointed time. We watch, and we wait.

“Concerning times and seasons, brothers, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. When people are saying, ‘Peace and security,’ then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober. For God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Every little glimpse of God that can be gained exceeds every pain and every joy that man can conceive without it.”

St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

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To All Saints Day

52 Two of Ten

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4:38-44

"A Larger Territory"

"After he left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them. At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them. And demons also came out from many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God.' But he rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Messiah. At daybreak, Jesus left and went to a deserted place. The crowds went looking for him, and when they came to him, they tried to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, 'To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent.' And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea."

Bring together a skilled salesperson, a product or service in demand, and a fertile territory—especially one with qualified leads, and a company can count on a certain measure of success. Some might argue that the proliferation of telemarketers indicates outdoor salespeople are a negotiable variable. And buyers often buy products and services for which they have little use. But those customers—a territory with potential—that's a fairly essential piece of the pie. The disciples were certain Jesus could have a lasting impact in Peter's neighborhood. After all, he'd "laid his hands on each of them and cured them," and "the crowds tried to prevent him from leaving them." Jesus was responsible for a larger territory, and so he headed "to the other towns." Aren't we grateful?

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"Nothing is mine. I no longer have anything but Jesus. No place, no thing, no person, no thought, no feelings, no honors, no suffering, can turn me away from Jesus."

St. Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879)

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To All Saints Day

53 Three of Ten

From Colossians, Chapter 2:6-10

“Well-Rooted in Jesus”

“So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power.”

“Look, Mommy, that tree fell over, and all of the roots are showing!” Sarah was right. The pin oak must have been at least sixty or seventy-feet tall, but heavy winds had caused it to fall, right across the front lawn of their parish school. It had shattered, sending limbs and shards of bark from one end of the front parking lot to the other. The root ball, though, was the primary topic of conversation. The root system was shallow. Older parishioners were unfazed, but the relatively small root ball surprised almost everyone else. “Such a tall, hearty tree,” they said, “but such a poor system beneath the surface.” Thank God, we’re “rooted in Christ, built upon him, and established in the faith,” a Church that abides in Christ.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Have a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ and love him. That is the beginning and end of life: faith the beginning and love the end.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch (Died c. 107)

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To All Saints Day

54 Four of Ten

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8:1-3

“An Equal Opportunity Ministry”

“Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.”

Granddad couldn’t have imagined visiting a female physician. His grandsons and granddaughters are all tended by doctors who are women. The same is true for his son’s accountant, his daughter’s dentist, and her husband’s boss at the store. We often talk of equality in the workplace, equal pay and equal opportunity, and so we should. Why did the changes take so long? Moreover, where did we lose our way? Female followers of Jesus were the first to see him risen from the tomb, and as early in his earthly ministry as the narrative we find in Luke, chapter 8, it’s clear those who journeyed with Jesus and the disciples included a great many faithful women. Thanks to the Spirit’s inspiration, we even know their names.

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“As iron is fashioned by the fire and on an anvil, so in the fire of suffering and under the weight of trials, our souls receive the form that our Lord desires for them to have.”

St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865)

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To All Saints Day

55 Five of Ten

From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 11:5-10

“Just Ask a Question. Anything.”

Misplace something important to you—your keys, cellphone or wallet—and the most sarcastic among us will say, “Don’t worry. You’ll find it in the last place you look.” Right. Keep looking. “Seek, and you will find.” When you have a need, “knock and the door will be opened to you.” A recognizable passage of Scripture with a familiar outcome, we know the words, and they readily apply to many areas of life. We wisely note the context. God awaits our call. As we might say in contemporary language, it’s as if God is saying, “I love you. Come talk to me. Ask a question. Anything. I’ll answer.”

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him, and he says in reply from within, Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything. I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.’”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“To approach God, one should go straight to him, like a ball from a cannon.”

St. Jean Vianney (1786-1859)

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To All Saints Day

56 Six of Ten

From 1 Timothy, Chapter 3:1-7

"When We Serve Best"

St. Paul provided St. Timothy a job description for elder service in the first century Church. More to the point, he offered a description of the kinds of people qualified for positions of leadership. We need leaders, and the apostles discussed qualifications. Standards were high. They still are. Two centuries ago, St. Jean Vianney cryptically wrote, "Leave a parish twenty years without a priest, and they'll be worshipping the animals." Left to our own devices, the products of inadequate faith can be questionable. We serve best when we're best served. Thank God for all those who answer his call.

"This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Therefore, a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control with perfect dignity; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of the church of God? He should not be a recent convert, so that he may not become conceited and thus incur the devil's punishment. He must also have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, the devil's trap."

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"I have given them the office of administering Christ to you, and have placed them like fragrant flowers in the mystical body of holy Church. The angel himself has no such dignity, but I have it to give those whom I have chosen for my ministries."

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

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To All Saints Day

57 Seven of Ten

From Jonah, Chapter 4:5-11

“Do You Have to Be So Self-Centered?”

“Think about someone else for a change.” A caution for an immature early adolescent, right? No, it’s pretty much the message God directed to his prophet Jonah, a man called to evangelize his sworn enemies. Jonah simply didn’t want to. Again, sounds like an immature child, doesn’t it? What he wanted instead originated in the vilest recesses of his corrupt heart. He’d rather have seen his adversaries doomed to destruction than see them saved to live another day, perhaps even a day lived to honor their Creator. “Think about them, Jonah. I created them too.”

“Jonah then left the city for a place to the east of it, where he built himself a hut and waited under it in the shade, to see what would happen to the city of Tarshish. Then the Lord God provided a gourd plant. And when it grew up over Jonah’s head, giving shade that relieved him of any discomfort, Jonah was greatly delighted with the plant. But the next morning at dawn God provided a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. And when the sun arose, God provided a scorching east wind; and the sun beat upon Jonah’s head till he became faint. Then he wished for death, saying, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’ But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have a right to be angry over the gourd plant?’ Jonah answered, ‘I have a right to be angry—angry enough to die.’ Then the Lord said, ‘You are concerned over the gourd plant which cost you no effort and which you did not grow; it came up in one night and in one night it perished. And should I not be concerned over the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot know their right hand from their left, not to mention all the animals?’”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“Highest Providence often works a wonderful miracle: that of having evil men make others who are evil to become good.”

St. Severinus (c. 480-c. 524)

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From Zechariah, Chapter 8:1-8

“With Kids in the Streets”

Gary’s father was raised in Brooklyn, rooted for the Dodgers, and remembers weekends on Coney Island. When he talks about his childhood, he describes summers spent on the stoop, playing stickball on the street, doo wop groups on the corner, and the relief a local fire company provided when they opened up a fire hydrant and sprayed the kids, while testing water pressure. The boys and girls in his neighborhood played in the street, all the time. Every time he sees a period photo of New York-area kids running through water like that, he looks for signs of the old neighborhood. It was safe, he reminds the family. Kids played in the street then. All the time.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am intensely jealous for Zion, stirred to jealous wrath for her. I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell within Jerusalem; Jerusalem will be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of old age. The city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets. Even if this should seem impossible in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it seem impossible in my eyes also? I am going to rescue my people from the land of the rising sun, and from the land of the setting sun. I will bring them back to dwell in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and justice.”

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

“While playing happily, a saint was once asked what he would do if an angel told him he was about to appear before the judgment seat of God. The saint promptly replied that he would continue playing because he was certain those games were pleasing to God.”

St. John Bosco (1815-1888)

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From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18:1-8

"To Be Found Faithful"

Persistence in prayer, consistency in faith, devotion to God and to personal integrity—we know they serve as characteristics of ardent Catholics. With God's help, and in the power of the Spirit, we choose to live lives of faith, and we prayerfully trust in God. We work at it, and the Scriptures remind us that we're not living out our faith alone. Not only do we share the work of ministry in our local parishes with others, but we follow the legacy of faithful parishioners. Like them, we know to pray. We cry out to God, and we believe he will answer us. When Jesus comes, we want to be found faithful. Will we?

"Then Jesus told a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said, 'There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, Render a just decision for me against my adversary. For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me. The Lord said, 'Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'"

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The daring ambition of aspiring to great sanctity has never left me. I don't rely on my own merits because I haven't any; I put all my confidence in him who is virtue, who is holiness itself."

St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)

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From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18:9-14

"A Welcome for the Humble"

For a loving Catholic parent, few experiences are sweeter than the few minutes spent in prayer with a young child—prayers often passed from generation to generation, memorized by their parents when they were children themselves. Plus, more than a few adults have been blessed by the tenderhearted requests of young people who simply offer whatever comes to mind. Eyes closed, heads bowed, and hands held tight, their intentions are more often than not humble and pure. We can learn from them, especially any of us tempted to preserve a whiff of arrogance as we kneel.

"Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else: 'Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income. But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

And, a Word from the Saints of the Church:

"The gate of heaven is very low. Only the humble can enter it."

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821)