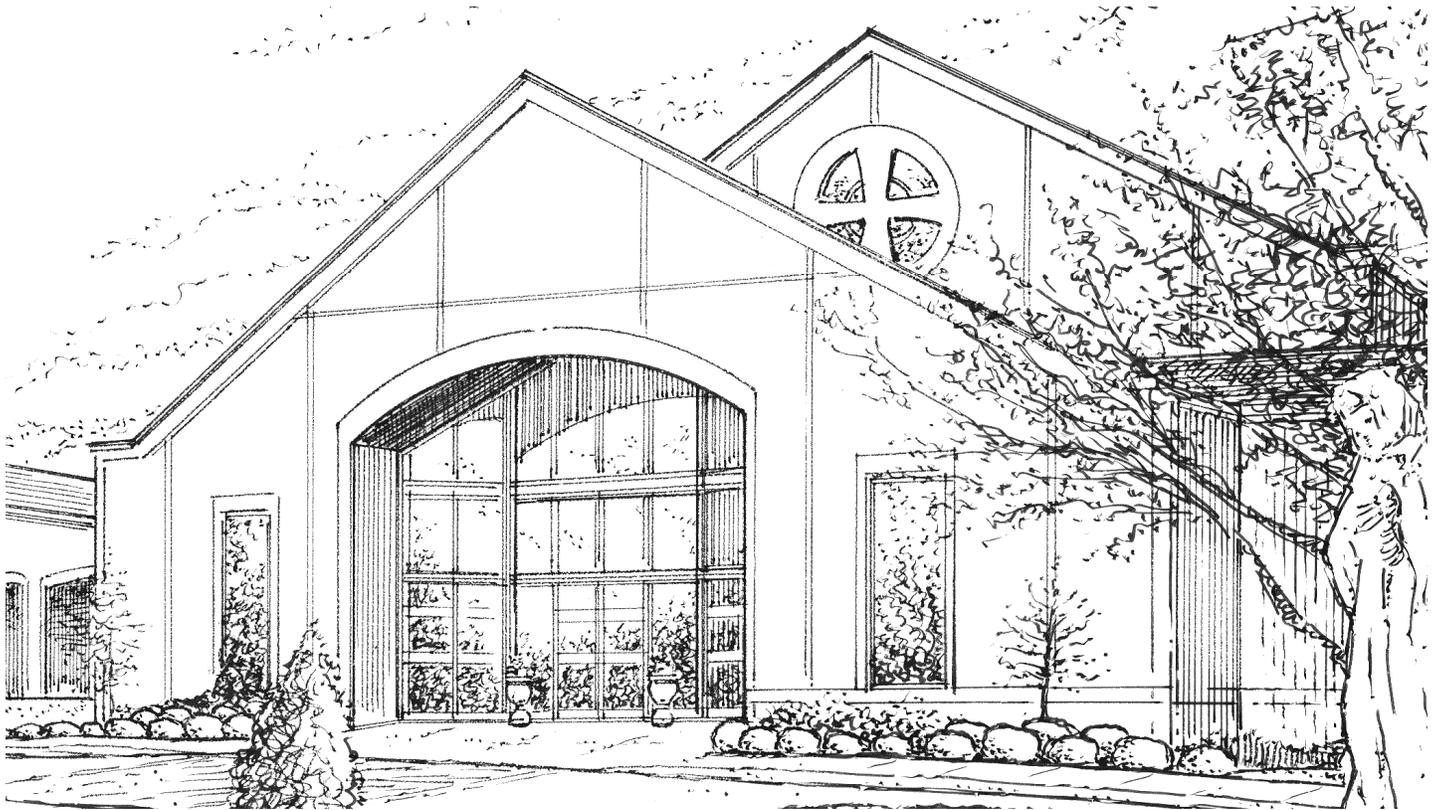


JANUARY 2018

THE ASCENT

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION





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LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

BY FR. TOM TANK



January 2018

Dear Fellow Parishioners,

Valentine's Day is really special this year! Not only is it a special day for sweethearts, but also a day that God calls us to a deeper relationship with Himself. It's not with chocolate candy that we celebrate this year, but with the ashes that remind us of our mortality and the sign of the cross reminding us of our immortality. Lent begins this year on Valentine's Day. It would be great for us to see this as a special valentine from God showing his love and inviting us to accept that love through the on-going conversion of our life.

Part of Lent is taking time to reflect on the reality of sin and the call to new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Sin is not a very popular topic. I remember well the book by the psychiatrist Karl Menninger, Whatever Happened to Sin? While many are very aware of sin, our secular culture with its moral relativism covers over sin with the delusion that it is just normal behavior. Whatever I think is right is right; whatever I think is wrong, is wrong! And I think very little is wrong. As human beings we have a tremendous ability to rationalize almost anything, all in an effort to avoid admitting the reality of sin and the need for changing our attitudes and our actions.

All of our sins are in some way an expression of the seven deadly sins. During Lent we are challenged to reflect on our own sinfulness and even more importantly on the practice of the opposite virtue. Thus we can grow in integrity and become the person that God, and ultimately we ourselves, want us to become. Following is a listing of the seven deadly sins juxtaposed with the virtues that counteract them.

CAPITAL/DEADLY SIN

PRIDE - Self-centered
AVARICE - being possessed by greed
SLOTH- spiritual laziness
LUST - objectifying people and sexuality
ANGER - unjustified wrath against self or another
ENVY - resentment at the good(s) of others
GLUTTONY- self-indulgence in food, drink

OPPOSITE VIRTUE

HUMILITY - honesty expressed in truthfulness
GENEROSITY - giving of self and possessions
FIDELITY - to spiritual commitments
CHASTITY - respect for sex - mine and others
PATIENCE - respecting differences with kindness
GRATITUDE - for blessings
MODERATION - in all things

These virtues correspond in turn with the Beatitudes - the attitudes of life that Christ enjoins as the source of true blessedness or happiness within our present lives and in anticipation of our eternal happiness.

I recently read a poster that said: "The groundwork for happiness is a healthy life." It was referring to physical health, but in an even deeper sense "The groundwork for eternal happiness is a healthy spiritual life." Lent is a special moment of grace for us to grow in the spiritual life leading us to greater happiness here and hereafter.

I encourage that during this Lent we examine our lives and identify our sins, but more importantly to practice the opposite virtues so that solid spiritual growth and deeper happiness will be ours this Easter. Happy Valentine's Day and Blessed Lent!

Father Tom

VOCATIONS

The Meaning of VOCATION: by Fr. Michael Guastello

The word vocation comes from the Latin word “vocari” which means to call. God calls each and every one of us to make a gift of self; to give love and to receive love in return. To love means to will the good of another person for the sake of that person; and, of course, the greatest good that we can will for another person is heaven. Therefore, we all have a calling from God to give the gift of ourselves, whether in marriage, priesthood, religious life or single life, to help all God’s children reach heaven.



VOCATIONS: Helping our kids discern their vocation.

We all listen to our children’s future plans over many years and it is interesting to observe how their plans change and evolve as they become older. Children begin to think about their future from a very early age. We all take part in the “what do you want to be when you grow up” conversation. We propose that you change the question to “How do you think God is calling you to serve Him and others when you grow up?” That will help kids understand that it is important to listen to God’s calling for their vocation and career choices, and if they do listen, they will be truly happy.

The choice of vocation—holy orders or religious life, sacramental marriage, single life—is a serious consideration and needs to be part of the question! We want you to ask the question, “Have you thought about being a priest or a sister?” A message for all children: Listen to God and pay attention to your heart. If your heart is telling you to join a group of brothers, sisters, or priests--go for it! It can be a great life. Be the best human being you can be, and along the way you will know God's joy because joy comes from a life well-lived. You will find God's peace because you will be living your calling.

Fr. Allan MacDonald is the vocation director for the [Companions of the Cross](#). He answers this question: How do we encourage our children to properly discern their vocation? **Love them where they are at and encourage them in their uniqueness. Support and encourage them when they do well and even when they make mistakes. Ask them what they think God could be calling them to do with their lives. It is their vocation, not their parent’s. Do not tell them what to do. Show them how to live a life of prayer and service, regardless of their choice of vocation.**

Adapted from Terry McDermott, Catholic Insight .com/ Carol Schuck Scheiber, vocationnetwork.org

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS LENT?

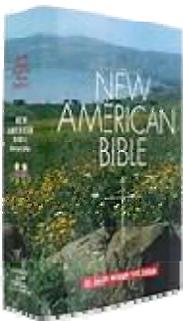
BY LIZ WILLMAN, DIRECTOR OF ADULT FAITH & RCIA

This year, all parishioners are invited to... **Join a Lent Small Group!**

Small groups of 8 – 10 adults will meet in Parishioners homes or at Ascension for the 6 weeks of Lent. Your host will facilitate the discussion each week. The program we are using is entitled, The Crux and was written by FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). The title of this study comes from the Latin word Crux which means “Cross”.



The great news about this Bible Study is that it is **FREE!** The only book you need is a Bible. Any version will do. If you don't have a Bible or if you have a nice family Bible that you would rather not write in, you can purchase a Bible for \$10 from the Parish office. They will also be for sale at the Parish Mission at Ascension on January 29, 30,31.



Each week, the discussion will focus on one passage of the Bible. There will be a small amount of background on the particular passage, but the majority of the time will be spent discussing how this passage relates to each of us as individuals in our life. God's word is a love letter to each of us!

Sign up for a Lent Small Group at the Parish Mission, during the reception in the Parish Hall each night. Sign ups will also be available online, on the Parish Website. The link to sign up will be sent out in the Thursday email blast as well. Groups will start the week of

February 12th as Ash Wednesday is February 14th this year.

There will be some “Family Friendly” homes where adults can bring their children along to play in another room during the study. Both daytime and evening groups are available.

Use this as an opportunity to meet other parishioners, and to spend some time with the Bible during Lent.

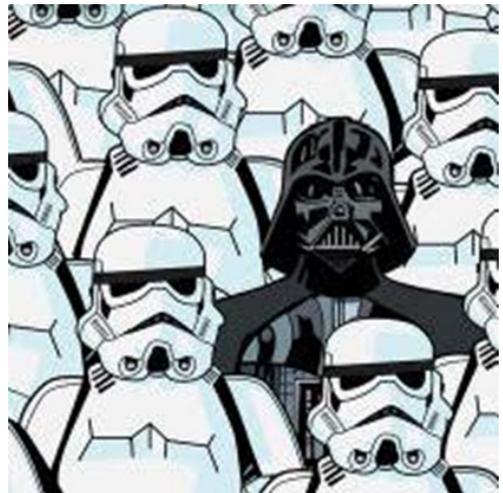
Questions? Contact Liz Willman, Director of Adult Faith and RCIA (913) 681-3348 ext.139 or lwillman@kcascension.org

ALL are WELCOME! You do not need to be a member of Ascension to join a small group.

The Star Wars hype over the release of the latest movie, *The Last Jedi*, has now died down. At least, for most people it has. The people in my family, however, are a different story!:) My husband and children LOVE Star Wars. In our house, when a person turns 10 years old, they are allowed the privilege of watching Star Wars. This past September, our third child turned the long awaited double digits and the Star Wars bingeing began as soon as possible! I love that my children and husband have a wonderful bond and affection for Star Wars. I love the good vs. evil that is in each and every movie. I love the strong female characters. I love the symbolism of faith we can find. BUT, I have to admit... I'm not a huge fan. I haven't watched all the movies. I don't know the names of most of the characters. I don't know which planet is which or who flies which ship. For lack of a better term, I'm a fair weather Star Wars fan.

Despite my half-heartedness, on the night my husband showed my 10 year old *Return of the Sith*, I decided to sit down and watch with them. I expected to be entertained. I expected to connect with my husband and children. What I didn't expect was to see myself in the movie!

To give a quick rundown for any other fair-weather fans out there, this movie is basically about how Anakin turns into Darth Vader. Throughout the movie, we watch Anakin come closer and closer to the Dark Side. We see him make one poor choice after another; killing someone when he knew he shouldn't, allowing his mentor Chancellor Palpatine to stroke his ego and fill his head. Anakin's turning was a "slow fade" or like boiling a frog. Every dark choice brought Anakin closer and closer to the Darkness.



Isn't that true of SO many of us! Me especially! We don't start out by making an evil choice. It starts with a small choice that's close to the line of Darkness. It's one small dark choice followed by rationale. Then another. And another. Before we know it, we realize, like Anakin, we've been walking very close to the Dark Side. As I was watching this movie, I realized I am allowing every one of my dark choices to change me. My anger at the recent and unexpected death of my mom was pushing me close to the Dark Side. My unwillingness to try to harness my rath was consuming my every thought. Slowly, I was changing into someone I did not want to be! Of course, anger is one of the stages of grief and something I must allow myself to go through as I mourn the loss of someone so dear to me. As Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has said, "Anger is just another indication of the intensity of your love". I know I must be easy on myself right now, BUT I also must work on moving through this phase. I must feel the anger and release it. If I am to avoid walking too closely to the Dark Side, I must spend MORE time in prayer not less. I must seek to come closer to my Father, even if (or especially when!) I don't feel like it. That night sitting on the couch snuggled in between two of the most precious people in my life, I saw myself in Anakin. And like him, I was allowing my anger to slowly turn me into Darth Corey.

DARTH COREY (CONTINUED)

BY COREY GRACE

In the movie, one of the good guys, Obi Wan tells newly named Darth Vader, "You have allowed this dark Lord to twist your mind until now you have become the very thing you have sworn to destroy." We all have a dark Lord that we struggle with. A dark Lord, that if we're not careful and purposeful, we can allow to twist our minds and our hearts. Lent is a perfect opportunity to step away from these dark Lords. It is a time to repent. To take a good long look in the mirror and let go of any/all darkness that keeps us from being who God made us to be. Lent is a time to cling to the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation. Lent is a time to seek our Father, ask for His Strength, and turn away from Darkness.

This lent, make a commitment to do just that. When one dark choice leads to another, stop the cycle and run to your Father! We know for certain that not only is He running to meet us with open arms, but that no Darkness is too big or too powerful for Him. After all, he is The Force.

May the Force be with you this Lent.

FIXER-UPPER

BY SARAH STREITWIESER

It was about one year ago that my husband and I noticed an abandoned house down the street from where we lived. Somehow in spite of the wood-rotted and sun-faded façade, we felt that the house was meant for us – a feeling that we now retrospectively see as a divine prompting (or maybe just a bout of temporary insanity!). After a bit of searching, we eventually were able to contact the homeowner, who had moved out almost a decade prior. We arranged a plan and set a price, without ever stepping foot into the house.

Our move came with all of the expected snags, and a few extra too. Somewhere in the middle of listing our old house (I should mention here how impossible it is to keep a home pristinely clean with five children living in it!), we realized that we all had head lice. We felt exhausted, overly busy, and uncertain about our decision to move. In short, we felt like the Israelites wandering through the desert. That week, the first reading of Sunday's Mass said, "Do not forget the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt ... who guided you through the desert, with its seraph serpents and scorpions." "Yes," I thought, "serpents, scorpions, and head lice too!"

With our Lord's faithfulness, all of our little hurdles were overcome, and we eventually made it to moving day. We felt blessed and bewildered to become the owners of a home that has such great potential, and also such great need of repair. Simply put, we had become the happy (and sometimes overwhelmed) owners of a fixer-upper.

FIXER UPPPER (CONTINUED)

Entering the house for the first time was an experience we will never forget. Overgrown landscaping led the way to a neglected exterior and a sticky front door, which opened into the place we now call home. The house was filled with the wonder of former glory and also countless casualties of neglect. Half-peeled wallpaper borders crowned almost every room. There were holes in the walls, carpet stained beyond recovery, and molded window trim (“molded moldings,” as I fondly tagged them). There were water-stained ceilings above us, raw-worn floors below us, dripping faucets in every bathroom, and even one pink toilet (a favorite feature to my daughters).

Months have multiplied into almost a year of repairs, patching, and paint. Unlike television shows with dramatic “before” and “after” transformations, our progress has taken and continues to take much time and effort. Nevertheless, we all feel deeply grateful to live here, like we are meant to reside here, and like this home fits us in a way that is both practical and poetic – easy and difficult to define.



As I enter into another Lenten season, I find parallels and mysteries in our moving experience that illuminate my spiritual journey. Living with a revolving laundry list of home projects is still a bit like wandering through the desert, with serpents and scorpions (but hopefully with no recurring cases of head lice!). Like the Israelites I am prone to doubt and complain as I wait for and journey toward the completion of our home.

Throughout our move the Lord has shown me much about Himself and His journey to reside within my own heart. For my entire existence He has wanted me, despite my worn paint and rot, despite my front door that sticks in summer heat (making it very difficult for Him to get in), and despite my many casualties of interior sin. He looks upon me and my imperfection with tenderness and patience. In some ways I think He even finds beauty in my weaknesses (not unlike my daughters’ feelings about the pink toilet!). He sees me fully for who I am now and also who I will become under the attentive work of His hand.

I come to Lent with a renewed desire to labor with my Lord in the interior work He is doing within me. I often feel discouraged by how slowly His work moves. I want to see dramatic changes like I see in the home improvement shows (all work completed in the timespan of a brief commercial break!). But He is humble and patient, not at all overwhelmed by the project lists. He shows me (in His own way) how He is meant to dwell within me, and how perfectly He fits – in ways practical and poetic alike. He is not hindered by my unworthiness. He is a God of fixer-uppers; and in His great love, He is working to fix-up me.

ASCENSION MISSION STATEMENT:

*We joyfully proclaim, celebrate, witness
and serve Jesus Christ.*

ASCENSION VISION:

*To be a Catholic community actively engaged with Jesus
Christ through sacramental life, faith formation and service.*

OUR VALUES:

*As parishioners of the Church of the Ascension, we embrace
the following values:*

- ♦ *Spirituality* - We will actively seek Jesus Christ and experience his grace through the celebration of the Mass, Sacraments and personal prayer.
- ♦ *Formation* - We will develop, nurture, and deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ through His Word and through knowledge of our Catholic faith.
- ♦ *Compassion* - We will humbly serve each other and those in need through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
- ♦ *Stewardship* - We will be good stewards of the gifts that God has given us and joyfully give of our time, talent and treasure.
- ♦ *Human Dignity* - We will be a public witness of Jesus Christ and advocate for the dignity of each human person as created in the image and likeness of God.
- ♦ *Hospitality* - We will actively invite and warmly welcome others to join us in our pilgrimage of faith.

40 PRAYERS FOR 40 DAYS

The three tenets of Lent are Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. In the spirit of growing closer to Christ through daily prayer, follow this guide to pray for a different person or group of people each day.

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| + | Feb 14: your spouse, future spouse or someone you love | + | Feb 15: Fr. Tom and Fr. Michael | + | Feb 16: someone who is sick |
| + | Feb 17: someone that has forgiven you | + | Feb 18: a neighbor | + | Feb 19: a new friend |
| + | Feb 20: someone facing a tough decision | + | Feb 21: someone who is lonely | + | Feb 22: a co-worker |
| + | Feb 23: someone going through a divorce | + | Feb 24: teachers | + | Feb 25: parents who have lost a child |
| + | Feb 26: seminarians and discerners | + | Feb 27: those who will die today & their families | + | Feb 28: the elderly |
| + | Mar 1: someone that needs your forgiveness | + | Mar 2: Pope Francis | + | Mar 3: your parents and siblings |
| + | Mar 4: someone struggling with addiction | + | Mar 5: the homeless | + | Mar 6: first responders |
| + | Mar 7: a stranger you encounter | + | Mar 8: our young people | + | Mar 9: the homebound |

40 PRAYERS FOR 40 DAYS (CONTINUED)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| + | Mar 10: all religious men and women | + | Mar 11: those affected by an abortion | + | Mar 12: the unemployed and underemployed |
| + | Mar 13: missionaries | + | Mar 14: refugees | + | Mar 15: those who have fallen away from their faith |
| + | Mar 16: doctors, nurses & health care professionals | + | Mar 17: those suffering from mental illness | + | Mar 18: those in the RCIA program |
| + | Mar 19: our national and world leaders | + | Mar 20: a teenager dealing with peer pressure | + | Mar 21: youth and young adult ministers |
| + | Mar 22: those living in poverty | + | Mar 23: someone who needs protection | + | Mar 24: someone who works for social justice |
| + | Mar 25: service men and women & veterans | + | Mar 26: Archbishop Naumann & all bishops | + | Mar 27: the deceased |
| + | Mar 28: our parish | + | Mar 29: caregivers | + | Mar 30: someone who has been abused |
| + | Mar 31: your best friend | + | Apr 1: your relationship with Christ | | |



Lord, teach us to pray



We have now completed our tour of the 16 stained glass windows around the outside of the Ascension sanctuary, and in this last installment I offer some reflections on the three large sets of windows behind the altar and tabernacle. These windows were crafted in Austria in 1924, and they resided in Missouri for many years before Ascension obtained them. During the church's renovation a few years ago, the windows were moved from the top of the front wall to their present location, allowing for our greater appreciation of the scenes and their rendering. Each set of windows includes a verse of Scripture in a bottom panel; the inscriptions have been cropped in these photos, but I have transcribed them below.

The Ascension of Jesus

The Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven. (Mark 16:19)

The centerpiece artwork of our renovated church depicts our parish's patron mystery, the Ascension of Jesus to heaven. As in the resurrection depiction to the left, Jesus is shown with His wounds, but radiant and richly clad, using the three-fingered, Trinitarian benediction so often seen in Christian art (and in some of the side windows). Mary and the eleven remaining disciples, their saintliness evinced by haloes, are shown in various poses. Mary and a couple of disciples appear to be praying to Jesus (a confirmation of Jesus's divinity), while others seem humble or supplicant. One disciple on the left, with arms outstretched, mimics Jesus's own orans position; this gesture by one of Jesus's original priests, which recalls Jesus's crucifixion pose (so present in the large crucifix above these windows), is still used today by the celebrant at Mass. Two disciples on the right appear to be returning Jesus's blessing, although I like to think that perhaps they are simply waving goodbye to their friend.



In Luke's account of this mystery in Acts, angels wonder why the disciples continue to stare after Jesus, who will return some day. It is as if they tell the disciples to stop gawking and get to work. They did just that, as Luke tells us in his gospel that the disciples continually praised God in the temple after Jesus's ascension, and Acts proceeds with their work leading the faithful and spreading Jesus's message. Indeed, the artist has included two domed edifices in the background of this scene. They might be palaces, representing the kingdom of heaven to which Jesus is returning; but they may also be churches, representing the true Church made up of the disciples and all subsequent followers of Jesus.

Finally, call me crazy, but the vegetation of the tree above the disciples on the right always looks to me like balloons ready to escape their tether. Like incense used in our liturgies, those ascending balloons suggest a realm above and beyond ours, reminding us of both the divine object of our worship and our heavenly goal.

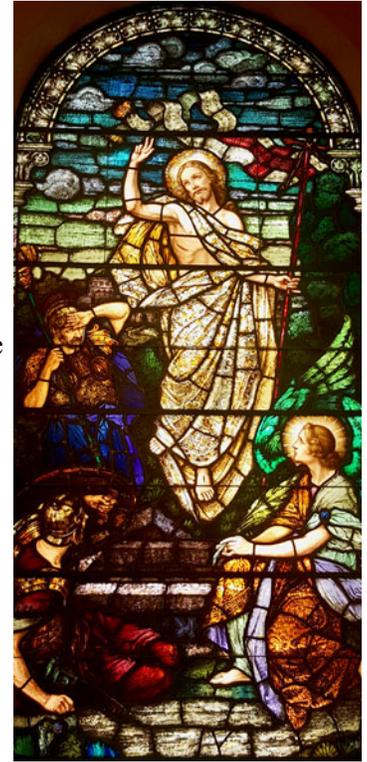
REFLECTIONS ON STAINED GLASS WINDOWS - PART 5 (CONTINUED)

The Resurrection

He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. (Matthew 28:6)

The left window behind the tabernacle depicts Jesus's resurrection from the tomb. The great fear of the two guards starkly contrasts with the peace and acceptance displayed by the woman, presumed to be Mary Magdalene (mentioned by name in three of the gospel accounts). The words of the inscription are spoken by the angel who appeared at the tomb, but the central figure in the window is instead Jesus Himself, appearing to rise. Thus, the window captures a scene that is missing from Scripture, which treats the event as a mystery by showing only the empty tomb. Resurrection scenes that include Jesus became prevalent in Christian art in the 12th Century, no doubt to satisfy the obvious desire to depict and witness the moment of Jesus's triumph over death. In this window, Jesus still bears the wounds of the crucifixion, but his royalty is finally evident, as he is radiant and attired in a sumptuous garment. His victory over death is symbolized by the cross and standard (the *crux longa*) that He bears, which is also a common element of Christian art dating back to the time of the convert Constantine, who used a battle flag displaying a cross.

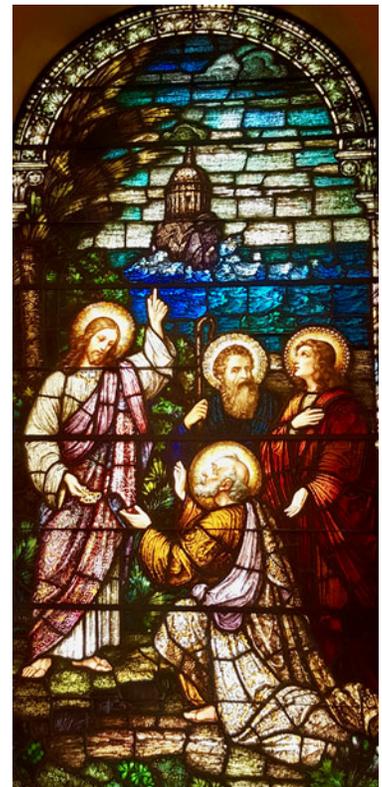
Finally, Jesus's three-fingered gesture might also refer to His various predictions throughout His public ministry that He would rise from the dead after three days. It is significant that the artist has taken the inscription for this window from Matthew, the only gospel in which the angel notes that Jesus has risen "as He said" He would. The miracle was not merely rising from the dead, but also having predicted it in the first place. Jesus could have sacrificed Himself and opened the gates of paradise quietly, but instead He chose to do it publicly, proving to the world that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. Thus, He kept appearing to others after His resurrection, to make His triumph known to His followers then and to future generations. Clearly Jesus intended to leave us a legacy of faith and loyalty to the gospel. Indeed, the building in the background suggests not only the temple that Jesus promised to rebuild in three days, but also His continued presence on earth in the Church.



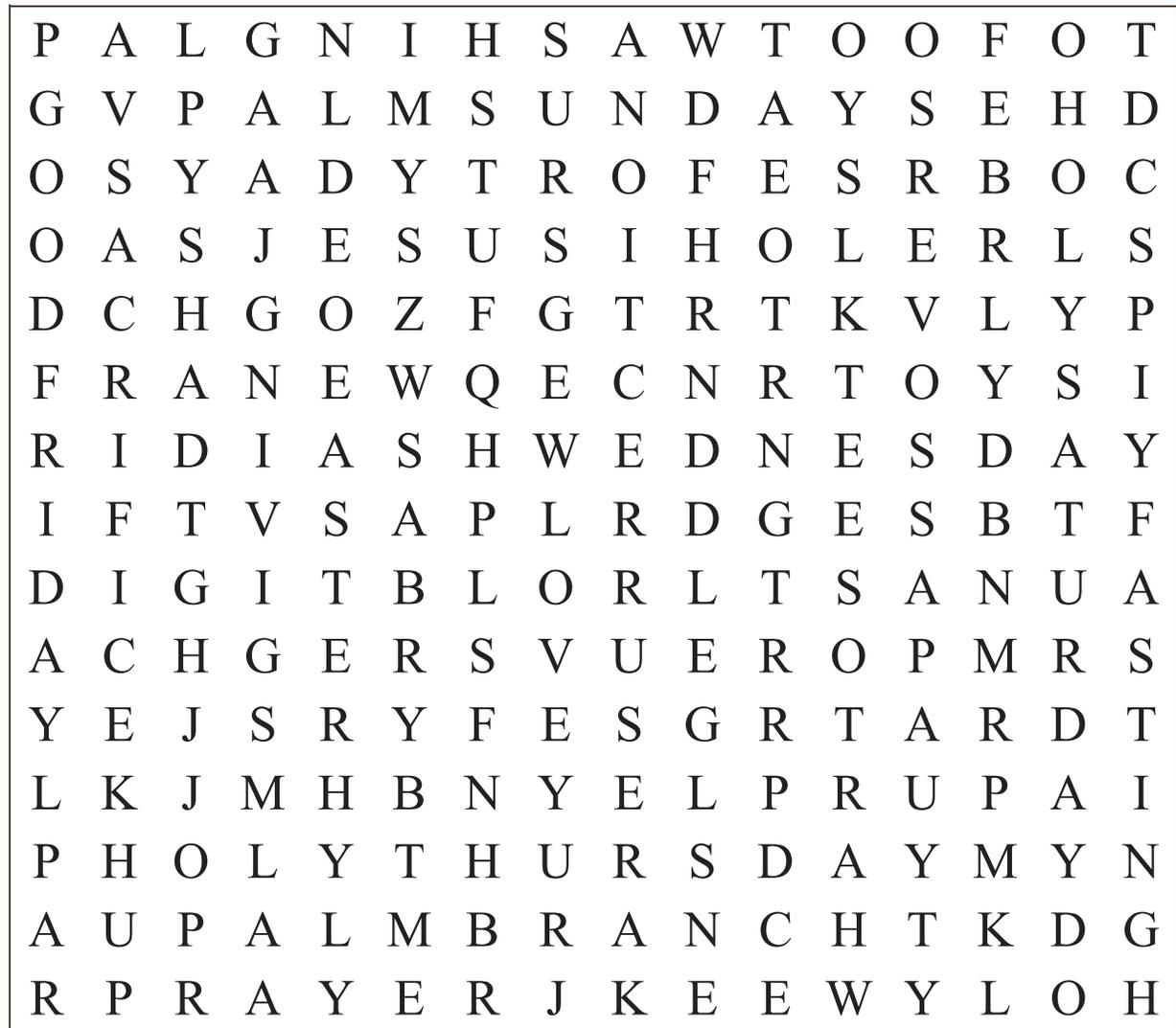
Jesus Gives Peter the Keys to the Kingdom

I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

In the window on the right side behind our tabernacle, Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven while two other disciples look on. Peter kneels, in service to his Lord, as Jesus appears to be pointing heavenward. Thus, the scene suggests Peter (and the other disciples) in the role of priest, taking Christ's place on earth to shepherd the people (note the staff held by one disciple). Later, in Matthew 18, Jesus would make that grant of authority more explicit, telling the disciples that whatever they bound or loosed on earth would similarly be bound or loosed in heaven. In this depiction, Jesus might also be pointing to the church set upon the rock in the sea, thereby suggesting Peter's other important role as the first pope (with the shepherd's staff becoming a crozier). While handing over the metaphorical keys in Matthew 16, Jesus also gives Simon the new name of Peter, while telling him that he is the rock (the literal meaning of "Peter") upon which the Church will be built. Just as the waves crash against the rock in the background of this scene, so too was Peter buffeted by doubt and denial during Jesus's lifetime. Nonetheless, Jesus chose that flawed man to lead us, who also have need for forgiveness and rehabilitation.



PREPARING FOR LENT WORD SEARCH



Almsgiving

Good Friday

Palm Branch

Ash Wednesday

Holy Saturday

Palm Sunday

Cross

Holy Thursday

Passover

Easter

Holy Week

Prayer

Fasting

Jesus

Purple

Foot Washing

Lent

Resurrection

Forty Days

Love

Sacrifice

NOTES:

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