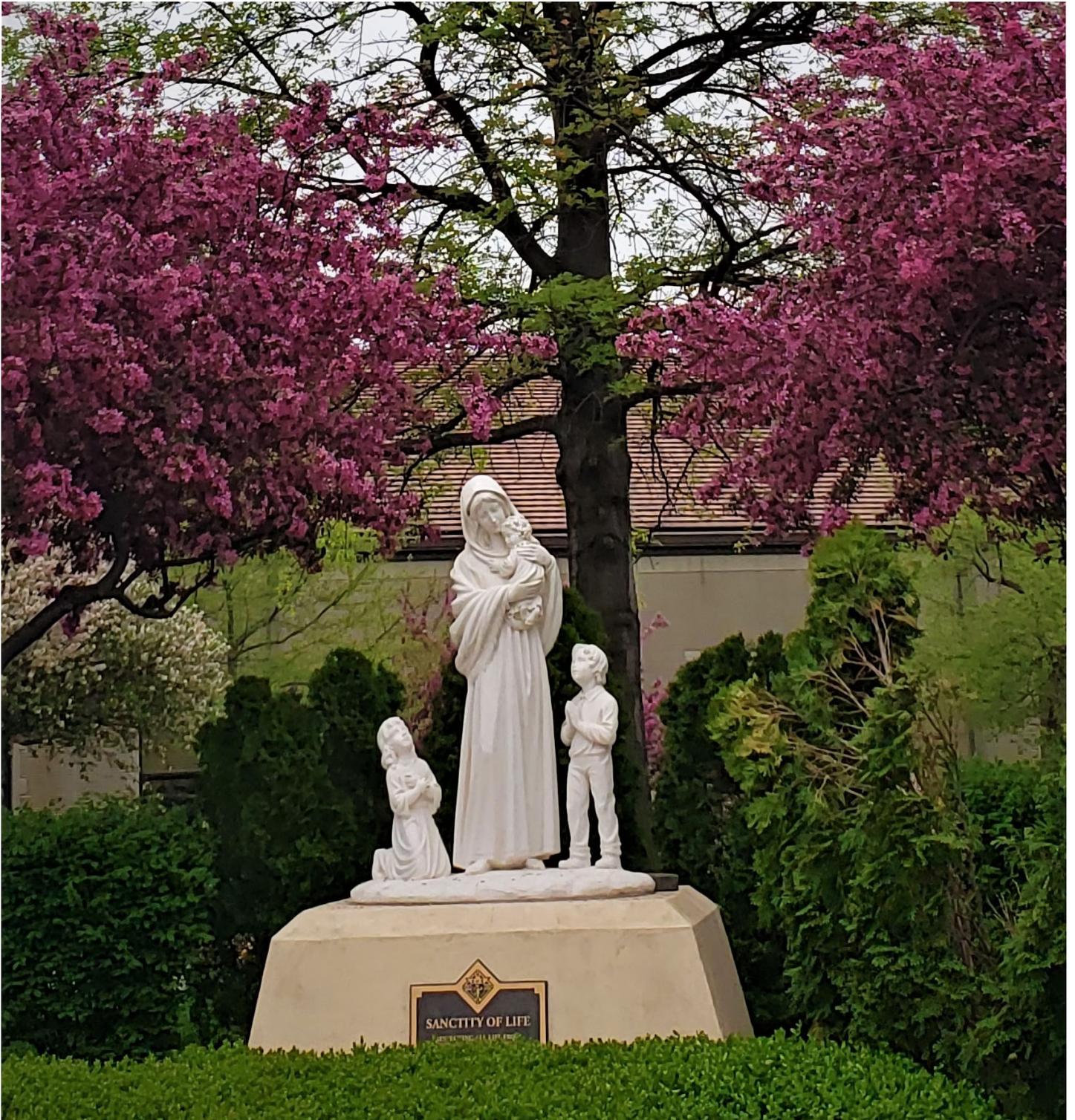


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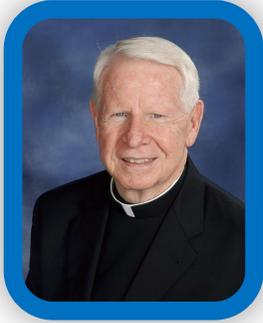
THE ASCENT





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May 2020

Dear Parishioners,

We are certainly living in strange times with the situation being uniquely different for each of us. We have never experienced the cancellation of so much of our regular engagements including school, work, recreations and church. Also, maybe for some, you have never had this much ‘family time’. And, of course, depending on how we approach it, this can be a blessing or a curse. Hopefully for all of you this time together is a gift and a blessing!

This ASCENT invites you to reflect on many things pertaining to family life. Of particular importance are the upcoming celebrations of Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day. These two civic celebrations are important opportunities to reflect on the crucially important role of parenting for families today. Mothers and Fathers are so fundamentally important to family life and the well-being of children.

The family is the basic structure of our society and of our church. Building up and encouraging strong family life is fundamental to the future good of society as well as the Church itself. Unfortunately there are many factors mitigating against families these days. Long ago I read that any effort to destroy a society will focus on undermining and destroying marriage and family life. Obviously we see much of that happening in our society today. And unfortunately it is affecting the church as well. Strong families are the basis for sharing faith and spirituality with future generations.

I am reminded of an incident that happened during an airplane flight sometime ago. This did not happen to me but to another priest on an overseas flight where food was served. This priest noted that his seat companion was not eating anything. He inquired as to why. She responded, “I am fasting.” He thought to himself that is a good and admirable thing to do. Then she said, “I am fasting to implore Satan to destroy Christian families”. What a shocking reason for fasting!

We need to pray and fast for ever more and stronger Christian marriages and families. As we celebrate Mothers’ and Fathers’ Day this year, we reflect on the vital importance of these people within our families and the unique contribution mothers and fathers make not only to the family but to the strength of the Church and society as well. Thanks to all the Moms and Dads who are loving their families in the good times and the difficult times. God bless each of you for the wonderful gift of yourselves to each other and to your children!

Fr. Tom
Pastor



Often times you will see a priest giving blessings, or blessing religious items after Mass. Have you ever wondered why people do that, or even if we should be asking the priest to do that for us? I will be talking about what are sacramentals and why they are important in the life of the church.



According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, sacramentals are “sacred signs instituted by the Church to prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and to sanctify different circumstances of our lives (no. 1677).” Sacramentals are associated with or imitate the church’s official rituals. They can be crucifixes, rosary beads, water, scapulars, devotional medals, statues, and other objects. Sacramentals are NOT “good luck charms,” or spiritual “get out of jail free,” cards. Sacramentals excite and encourage pious dispositions and are made effective through faithful devotion, love of God, prayer and sorrow for sin.

Sacraments	Sacramentals
Instituted by Christ	Instituted by the Church
Efficacious signs of God’s Grace. They convey to use the grace they signify in virtue of the right or action performed.	Confer grace from the work of the one performing the action.
Confer both sanctifying and sacramental grace as they are conferred	Do not confer sanctifying grace immediately, but rather, dispose the individual to receiving it.

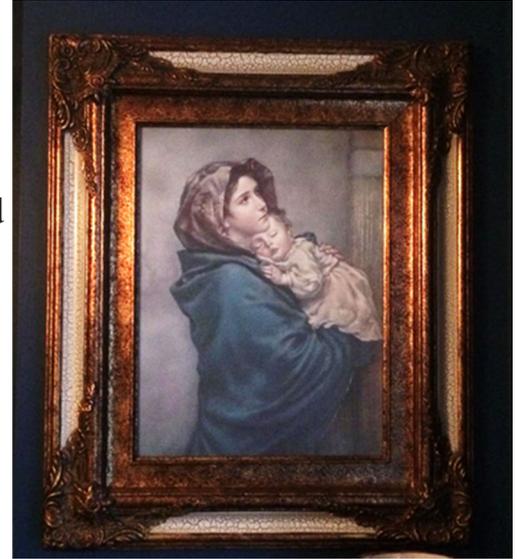
Incorporating these items into your prayer life can lead to a closer relationship with God and the saints. It is not an act of superstition (like if I get my car blessed with holy water, it will work better) but a chance to ask God for his intercession in things that really matter. When I bless myself each morning with holy water and do the sign of the cross, I am asking God to protect and bless me that day and help me to grow closer to him in the paschal mystery of his life, death, and resurrection. I wear a gold chain with a crucifix around my neck, which was given to me by my father, not to show everyone how holy I am, but to remind myself that I can do nothing without Jesus and that I may be an instrument of his Grace through my actions and words today.

In this time of quarantine, where we cannot come to the church for the sacraments, let us use sacramentals to keep us focused on God and prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments and to sanctify our lives today. It is easy to forget about God and faith, especially, when we aren’t able to physically come and receive Him, but sacramentals are given to us by the church to always keep our minds, hearts, and souls focused on Christ and to come to him with our request and prayers. Email me (frviet@kcascension.org) and I will come over to your house (with proper physical distancing) and bless items and water, and help you understand how you can use those sacramentals daily to strengthen your spiritual and prayer life.



I have two pieces of artwork hanging in my home just a few feet from each other. Both depict Jesus and Mary.

The first is a print of the famous “Madonna of the Street” by Roberto Ferruzzi. Growing up in Omaha, NE as one of the 8 Russell kids, this print was on our dining room wall. We gathered each Sunday for dinner in the dining room, brought out the china and Waterford and celebrated Sunday as a special day to gather as family. A few years after my mom died in her 50’s my dad had my siblings and I gather at the family home to distribute some family items. My little sister wisely put her name on this print. At the time, I didn’t think much of it. It was 10 years later, when I was turning 40 that I received a gift certificate and knew exactly what I wanted to purchase with it. My own print for my dining room.



A few years later, I received the second print from a candidate going through RCIA. It is of Mary and Jesus at the foot of the cross.



It occurred to me recently, that when I sit at my desk, I see both images at the same time. It caused me to reflect on Mary and the journey she traveled from the “womb to the tomb” as we refer to today when we speak of the sanctity of life. It’s one of our great teachings of the Catholic Church and it finally dawned on me that Mary was the first to travel this road with absolute faith in God. She will remain a role model to me of embracing motherhood each step of the way: the beautiful, the unknown, the possible terror of watching our child face something unimaginable. But walking the journey with God and faith through it all.



A PERSPECTIVE OF GRIEVING PARENTS

It wasn't until my sister died, that I realized how devastated parents can become with the loss of a child. It was Easter Sunday 1992; my siblings and I were standing outside the hospital just minutes after the death of our oldest sister Barbara who had battled cancer for only a short time. As our parents approached from the parking lot, with tears in my eyes, I told them, "She's gone." As I watched the reaction of my normally stoic father, I witnessed a man who just had his breath taken away. Tears then began to stream from my mom's eyes. It was a moment that will be forever etched in my memory. Ironically, my wife Patty had the same experience with the loss of a brother at age 23 in 1979.

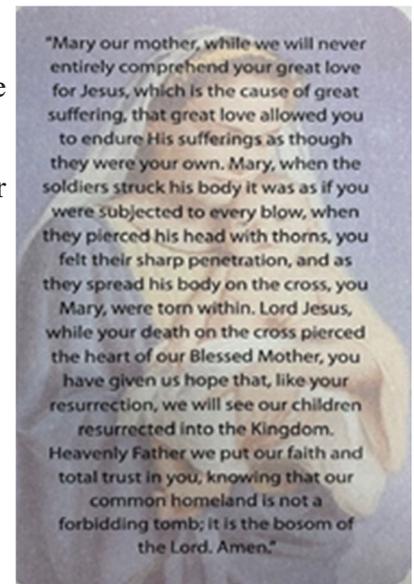
Never in my wildest dreams would I imagine that nineteen years later, Patty and I would be faced with the same experience. While we were anxiously anticipating news in the waiting room of St. Luke's South, the emergency room doctor entered to inform us that they worked unsuccessfully to revive our twenty-nine-year-old son Blaine, after experiencing sudden cardiac death. We both sat in total disbelief, realizing we were now members of a club nobody wanted to be a part of. We were not only members of the "club", we were also now in a group of parents whose chance for divorce just rose sharply. Sadly, nearly 80% of marriages where a child is lost end up in divorce.

Thankfully, with the wisdom and guidance of our pastor Fr. Tom Tank, we became aware of the challenges we would face as a couple. Fr. Tom shared with me that men and women grieve differently; mothers grieve differently than fathers. He pointed out the importance of open communication and that no matter what, I needed to be supportive of Patty and her grief, even though I may not understand what was going on with her emotions. It is also important for couples to communicate openly, because men tend to hide emotions to protect their spouse. That's exactly what I tried to do, thinking I was doing the noble thing. Mothers need to see the father grieving; it lets them know that the father is also feeling the pain of loss.

In the months following Blaine's death, life seemed to feel very empty and dark for us, especially for Patty. After many, many months, and a lot of searching, Patty realized that there wasn't anything offered for grieving parents that was scripturally based from a Catholic perspective. It was then that she decided we needed to begin a Catholic based ministry for parents who have lost a child. We spoke with a few other parents who felt the same need, and with the encouragement of Fr. Tom and the Office of Family Life at the Archdiocese, Project Chrysalis was launched in October of 2018. Chrysalis means transformation; the butterfly emerges from the cocoon, it struggles for a time, but eventually emanates transformed into a symbol of new life. Through this ministry, and hope in scripture, we begin to understand the beauty of a new life in Christ!

All parents and grandparents who have lost children and grandchildren are welcome to join our group. We meet people where they are, allowing grieving parents to share as little or as much as they desire when we gather. In the past 20 months, members of this group have become an extended family, of sorts. There is a common bond that holds us all together. We meet the last Tuesday of every month and we laugh, we cry, we support each other, and we celebrate the lives of our children. For more information, visit the website at hopeinscripture.com or our Facebook page - @projectchrysaliskc.

As we approach Mother's Day this month and Father's Day in June, let us remember all mothers and all fathers; those who nurture their children here on earth, those who carry some, if not all their children in their hearts, and those who yearn to conceive a child. It takes a strong man or woman to be a parent, and an even stronger man or woman to be a grieving parent.





A Surprising Journey of Love

“God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus...” (1 Corinthians 1:28-30) It all came about so very surprisingly. *Me? Oh no, Jesus, surely not I. You must have mistaken me for someone else.* As a naïve two-week-old freshman in college, my call to religious life, initially, was anything but well received. It is significant to note that my fear and trepidation was not due to the nature of the call, but rather due to my deep misconceptions of it.

On July 28, 1995, Gordon and Margaret Laville received their first child. I am told I was rather short-tempered and difficult to appease. Most of my early childhood took place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For a brief period, we lived in El Dorado, Arkansas, where I received, for the first time, the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. By 2005, we (I was now the oldest of four children) landed in the Leawood/Overland Park area where I attended Nativity Parish School for fifth through eighth grade.

The development of my character springs from two rich sources: my father and ballet. Unbeknownst to my father, nor to my dance instructors, Christ used them both to prepare me for religious life. My father taught me how to love and how to obey, for it is in loving that we obey and in obeying that we love. I remember as a little girl trying to convince him to do something for me. “Dad, if you do, I’ll be your *best friend*.” Without flinching, he gently replied, “I don’t want to be your friend. I want to be your father.” My dance instructors taught me how to spend all of myself for something I love. “No pain, no gain” was applied in the studio daily.

However, by the end of my high school career at Blue Valley North, life at Kansas City Ballet School left me empty—I was thirsting for something more. As I began to let go of dance, I became heavily involved in The Learning Club in KCK. My fruitful tutoring experiences with these children led me to pursue Elementary Education at Fort Hays State University in 2013. Providentially, God used the Catholic campus center there to make my prayer life expand and flourish beyond measure. It was there, in the amber waves of grain, that Christ asked me to follow Him by a narrower path and with undivided love.

As I mentioned before, I was initially very frightened of this call. I desired marriage and family life tremendously. *Does God care about my desires? Doesn’t He know that I’m not good enough to be a Sister?* With every sign He gave me, my fear and denial grew.

Ever so patiently, with overflowing graces, Jesus showed me the reason for His call: His abounding, infinite love for a little girl in Kansas. How could I say no to Love itself? Finding myself in Wichita during an internship with a pro-life organization, Justice for All, I encountered the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from a distance at a weekday Mass. I felt drawn toward their community, which led to visiting the convent and applying for entrance. I entered the community on August 14, 2015 and made my first profession of vows on April 28, 2018. After five years in the convent, you may wonder, *is she still happy?* The degree of my joy grows daily, for there is no place I’d rather be than living in Heaven on earth.



PROJECT RACHEL... A CALL TO SHARE MINISTRY

By Mary Jo Doherty



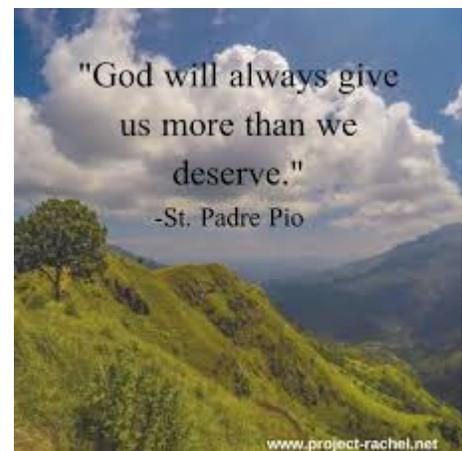
Abortion is a word that most of us don't want to think about much but, in reality, there is a high percentage of women in our country every day who end up choosing abortion because they feel there is no other alternative. I would like you to know about a Catholic ministry that works with abortion issues every day and is greatly dependent on your Call to Share donations. It is called Project Rachel.

Most of society pretends that abortion "erases" the experience of pregnancy. Some women tuck away the event for years, some try to find ways to suppress their pain with medication and alcohol and others wrestle with depression and anxiety disorders, failed relationships, infertility and pregnancy difficulties perhaps never even making the connection between these difficulties and their abortion.

The aftermath of abortion is grief and guilt and that is where Project Rachel can step in. This program offers spiritual and psychological care through professional counselors and specially trained priests who provide one-on-one help. This is confidential care for men and women, Catholic and non-Catholic. The care includes counseling, support groups and retreats. It is a program of "healing" in the heart of the Catholic Church. This nationwide Catholic ministry is based on forgiveness for those suffering after abortion. The Church stresses that God's mercy is always available and without limit and that Christian life can be restored and renewed through the sacraments. A union with God can be accomplished despite all other problems. A percentage of our Call to Share Donations helps fund this agency and they exist partly because of this funding.

After Phil and I had spoken at our Masses about this ministry, we received a letter from a woman who had worked with Project Rachel to get her life back together after losing her child to abortion. She said she could hardly function because she felt that not only had she lost her child, but she thought she had lost her God and her Church as well. Working in the Project Rachel program she found God's mercy and forgiveness through counseling, prayer and the sacraments. She began to feel "whole" again and found that she could live again with God by her side because of his love for her. She thanked us for bringing attention to this program and letting people know that it is available to women who need help.

Our Call to Share donations help fund 45 other ministries besides Project Rachel. Your generosity can completely change the direction of so many families from disparity to hope, and you can truly make a difference. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." What better way can we do that than to support these ministries. Thank you for your gift of hope.



HE IS THE TREASURE

By William O'Leary



Catholicism is about one thing: God. More specifically, Catholicism is about someone: God. Central to our belief in God is the person of Jesus Christ who was fully human and fully God when he dwelt among us on this earth. Now He lives in us through the Holy Spirit and through the Eucharist.

I remember going to college and becoming aware of the habits of students who would go spend time with Jesus present in the chapel and attend daily Masses. Observing their witness inspired and drew me to love the Holy Eucharist more deeply. Those days in college rooted my deep love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist which I treasure even now.

Two fellow parishioners have shared how the Eucharist impacts their lives:

The Eucharist gives me the strength and determination to navigate through difficult times. It fills my spirit with faith and hope and reminds me that Jesus is there with me and for me, just like the time when He was with the disciples on the same boat and commanded the storm to pass. The Eucharist makes me feel safe and protected in the arms of my Lord. There is nothing like being intimately united to Jesus by physically and spiritually receiving him in the Eucharist. – Oscar Alonzo

The Eucharist is my unfailing source of true peace. Whether at Mass, in the adoration chapel, or lately in the Ascension parking lot or live-streaming online, being in the presence of the Eucharist calms the storms of my life. In the Eucharist, I feel the Lord's call to "be still" and my soul obeys and is filled with a peace that only God can provide. ~ Lori Buck

The Holy Eucharist echoes in the Lord's Prayer "give us this day our daily bread". Even when we cannot receive Him on a daily basis, it is a reminder that our strength, virtue, peace and joy are rooted in the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. The Catechism in paragraph 27 says: "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for."

Let us be a Eucharistic people who live out the deepest desires of our hearts by feeding on the one who never stops searching for us, so that in and through the Eucharist, our true treasure, we will find the truth and happiness that we seek.





On June 18th we will celebrate Father's Day. We recall that we were all made in the image and likeness of God Himself. How will you celebrate this year? It probably depends on your experience of fatherhood. There are many men who are beloved by their families. There are many of us who look back on our fatherhood and know we could have done better.

What does it mean to be a father? Is it just work, diapers, stress and a few moments of pleasure in between? Hope for a better, happier life only comes with a greater understanding and commitment to God.

Ever wonder what was God the Father's plan for man and woman before and after the sin of Adam and Eve?

Fathers were made to be the touch of God that our children and spouses could not otherwise feel, to be the voice of God the Father they could not otherwise hear, and the image of God the Father they could not otherwise see. In other words, we were endowed by God the Father to supply our family and spouses the sacrificial love of God Himself - to always put their needs above our own. No compromising.

We were empowered by the Holy Spirit through our baptism. We were anointed priest, prophet and king. And we are to live this according to the example Jesus set. As priest, Jesus sacrificed himself as a sin offering. As prophet, he taught all the Father said. As king, Jesus served his people. This is God the Father's plan for us.

Serving as priest, prophet and king is the meaning of loving God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength with understanding. In doing so He allows us to share in His divinity. Imagine choosing to be like God with His power to sustain us, instead of following our own plans for life that always seem to lead to regret.

To be great fathers we have to be great sons. God the Father trusted St. Joseph to be, like Him, father to His Son. But first, St. Joseph had to be a son to the Father. How did he do this?

At Fathers of St. Joseph ministry, we learn Joseph lived his life as an example for us according to 4 pillars - embracing silence, embracing woman, embracing child, and charitable authority.

The 1st pillar is silence. Silence before ourselves, silence before men, and silence before God. The world teaches us to depend on ourselves, so our minds are constantly full of anxiety. But Joseph relied on God. He made a human decision to quietly set Mary aside, but had the humility to trust God's plan and reversed his decision. He didn't seek worldly success so that men would praise him, but instead trusted God in all things. His job was at the service of his fatherly vocation. Not the other way around. "Seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these shall be yours as well." Matt. 6:33. Finally, Joseph had to be silent before God and know Him through deep prayer and a desire to live a righteous life; to hear His small, quiet voice. How often is it that only after our ways fail, do we attempt to pray, and then always asking, rarely thanking or praising, and almost never just being still in His presence?

The 2nd pillar Joseph's life teaches us is that we must embrace woman. First "the woman", Mary, then all women, then namely our spouses. Our salvation comes through our families. What keeps us from embracing our spouses? Too often we judge our spouses by how much they do for us against how much we do for them. We may always see ourselves as giving more than our spouses. Mentally we use scales of justice weighted in our favor by pride and selfishness, supported by lust, which leads to resentment. Joseph shielded Mary from his own lust by preserving chastity, while being perfectly joined to her spiritually. His work, desires, expectations, goals and even definition of success were first centered on God, then God through Mary. Being unlike Joseph, we attempt to manipulate our spouses to serve ourselves instead of providing the self-donation of our lives under all conditions, regardless of what we believe they deserve. Finally, Joseph's self-donation was not only what he wanted to give Mary, but most importantly, what she needed from him. He was the man she needed him to be. We must be the gift our spouses need, not the gift we want to be.

FATHERS (CONTINUED)

Joseph embraces the child Jesus. This is the 3rd pillar. Joseph spiritually adopts Jesus and sees God in his child. Do we see God in our children as Joseph saw in Jesus? God descended to our level in all ways but sin, to lead us by example. Do we descend to our children and lead by example, sharing what we learned from our failures, and being examples of humility, trust, justice with mercy, faithfulness, and repentance? If not, where will they learn these virtues?

Finally, the 4th pillar - St. Joseph accepted his charitable authority and used it well. To best understand, we look to the root word of authority - author. When God writes salvation history, he is the author with human participants. He hasn't stopped writing. He uses us today in His plan of salvation. We are called to cooperate with the stirrings of the Holy Spirit to continue God's saving actions in our families. We are to author our stories in the same way God does, with agape love: totally, freely, fruitfully, and faithfully. Our marriage vows carry the same requirements for the benefit of our families. This agape love is the same love God showed when He sent his only beloved son to die for us. How do we die for others if we struggle to "give up the proverbial remote control"? It's a huge struggle to turn our focus from ourselves, and to see and fulfill the needs of those around us first. Headship (baptized king) means we serve, not be served, in the same way that Jesus does for us, and Joseph did for Jesus and Mary. How will God's plan of salvation be written in your family?

These theological questions must be made practical. Our lives must change. Not as a matter of convenience but applying to our lives change that moves us closer to holiness and perfection. The only person anyone can change is oneself. These are the bars of achievement we discuss and contemplate in our souls at Fathers of St. Joseph.

There are several ministries at Church of the Ascension that help fathers make needed changes.

Fathers of St. Joseph meets weekly, expressly for this purpose of changing our lives for the benefit of our families. Each participant is encouraged to learn specific steps to alter his own behavior. This is a place and time to allow God to redirect our efforts to be more like Him and to understand our wives and children. Says one participant, "This is one of the toughest things I've ever participated in, but I keep coming back. It's like bodybuilding for your marriage. It's sometimes painful, but the results are there. I didn't previously understand how much the success of my marriage hinges on the sacrifices I'm willing to make, but St. Joseph shows us the path, and Devin Schadt, the founder of Fathers of St. Joseph, does a great job of showing us St. Joseph. And I'm not alone. I have the grace of the sacrament, and I have a few guys in FOSJ to journey with me." We hope you consider joining us. For more information, or to learn how to join (BTW, no dues here!), contact Phil Hernandez, phernandez@trinitykc.com.

Raising a Modern Day Knight is a formation program for dads and their 7th grade sons. Says recent participant Sergio Del Pino, "Raising a Modern Day Knight should happen in every parish! It's a great course to assist in reinforcing your beliefs in raising your son, surrounding you and your son with great role models and friends, leading him to approach upcoming manhood as a Knight, revolving his life around Christ. I have no doubt that Knighting my son will have a lifelong impact!" Modern Day Knights starts meeting in January, and culminates with a ceremony around March. Look for more information later in the year.

Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters is designed for dads and their daughters. It is for 7th grade girls and their fathers. Dads enter formation in January, meeting several times to grow as fathers and plan a special weekend with their daughters just before spring break. Says recent (and repeat!) participant Todd Gomez, "The program is another great way to show your daughter that she is cared for and loved as she enters womanhood. And that her dad has her back!" Look for more information later this year, or contact Chris Martin for more information, chrisandlacey@mac.com.

Project Patriarch is gathering of men who seek to pass something timeless to their grandchildren and great grandchildren. They seek not to pass on material wealth, which is fine, but moreover, to pass on the traditions of living faith-filled lives that will allow them to experience everlasting life together. Look for information on the next retreat, or contact Dan Spencer, dspenceriii@kc.rr.com, for more information sooner.

THE TEARS OF LONGING

By Melissa Hanks



In talking to my friends about the beautiful gift of adoration during the time of shelter-in-place, one mentioned the tears of holy longing that filled her car as Fr. Viet passed by with the monstrance containing our Blessed Sacrament. I have really dwelt on this since reading those words. How fitting that we celebrated on Palm Sunday, going into Holy Week. As so many have said lately, we are living Lent in a way that echoes the very first Holy Week.

The tears of holy longing.

How much our experience must echo the feelings of our Blessed Mother and Christ's apostles during that very first Holy Week, beginning with their Last Supper with Our Lord. Spending time with their beloved friend and Lord as He instituted the Eucharist for the sake of us all. They followed this wondrous experience with having their dear friend arrested and taken from them. They did not know what was really about to happen, though Christ often foretold His fate. They did not know what lied ahead of them, only that their Lord was gone, in the hands of enemies who hated Him.



The tears of holy longing.

My grief and joy upon seeing the Blessed Sacrament again in person was sudden. Tears flowed as I gazed upon Our Lord who had died for us and who was residing in the beautiful monstrance for the moment. I missed receiving Communion so badly. It had been close to a month since we were last able to attend Mass, naively expecting each following weekend to be similar, expecting that we could take the availability of our Blessed Lord for granted. I don't remember in my adult life taking the Eucharist lightly, but now we know the great longing that many martyrs and saints have felt in waiting for their next Holy Communion in the Church. In the weeks since the quarantine began, I have twice driven to the Church parking lot to adore Our Savior, for while I know I cannot go in, I do know that within those four walls, He still dwells, loving us from afar. My longing for Him was only slightly relieved by sitting in the car knowing He was there.

The tears of holy longing.

How the Apostles and Mother Mary must have grieved Jesus, missing Him in their lives. Those who were brave walked Calvary with Him, sharing in His pain. How disheartened they must have been to walk away from their Beloved after He died on the cross. I think of the tears of holy longing that our Blessed Mother must have felt. I cannot imagine the pain of seeing a child that you bore tortured, and murdered at the hands of the ignorant. How she must have ached to hold Him again, to hear His laugh and see His smile. She knew what was to come, but surely Mary grieved the loss of her dear son.

THE TEARS OF LONGING (CONTINUED)

The tears of holy longing.

I hole up in my home with my family, hoping we will remain safe. The desire to attend Mass again deep on each of our hearts. We hold our first prayer service provided by the Archdiocese, and my daughter says, “Mommy, I don’t want to just pray. I want to receive Jesus, in the Eucharist.” Me too, darling, me too. How I long for that day! But today, we will fulfill a spiritual communion and look forward to that day.

As Fr. Viet headed inside to return the Eucharist to the tabernacle, I sobbed. My mind cried, “Jesus come back. Don’t leave us!”

The tears of holy longing.

Following Christ’s death on the cross, the apostles went to the upper room and hid. They were afraid of what was to come and did not know if they too would suffer a similar fate. Hiding in fear, they waited to know that the world was going to be okay. They clung to each other, and pondered their Lord who felt so lost to them. Tears of holy longing surely clung to their faces. How could they not long for the presence of their friend and His stabilizing Love? “Jesus come back. Don’t leave us!”

But friends, this isn’t the end! Our Lord suffered this death for us. He remained apart for three days, meanwhile the Apostles wondered and grieved over their loss. If this was the end of the story, we would not be crying our own tears today. Jesus overcame the grave so that we may one day be in heaven with Him. The Apostles who cried in the upper room, were greeted by their Beloved, and were overcome with joy, knowing that God’s mercy never fails. His perfect love did not end. Many of those same Apostles, who had been quivering with fear, did go on to valiantly die similar deaths as Jesus Christ. They did so because they knew. They KNEW that God had won the fight. They proceeded to go out into the world and tell the Good News, because they no longer feared what was to come.



Cry the tears. They are a gift from God Himself. They represent the deep faith that you possess, knowing that Our Lord and Savior is truly in the Eucharist. Know that one day, our moment to go into the world bearing the Good News will exist. Pray for those who are alone in their own tears. May they receive consolation. One day, we will once again be united with Him, our Beloved. The joy that we will feel! The tears of reunification that we will cry as once again as Jesus Christ dwells within ourselves!

As I drove away on the most recent visit to the parking lot, I could see the red tabernacle light shining through the darkened church. Christ is still there, with us, though we cannot see Him. And He anxiously awaits being united with us once again

THE QUARANTINE QUILT

By Sarah Streitwieser



My spring did not turn out as I had planned. I am guessing that I am not alone in that sentiment. Our previously intact plans, lives, and livelihoods — perhaps even our physical and mental health — seem as though they have been ripped apart, shredded into a pile of scraps. Going forward, we basically have two options: we can glower at the scraps, regretfully mourning and wanting what they once were; or we can carefully retrieve the pieces — tattered as they may be — and sew them into a quilt.

Quilts

I love quilts, but I am a horrible seamstress. Perhaps my quilting ineptitude is not surprising to you — after all, how many women under the age of 40 (50, 60 maybe?) maintain this tradition? Let me start with a little bit of personal background.

I grew up in a family with a beautiful, matriarchal presence. Tuesday nights were for sewing, a circle of aunts, great-aunts (even one great-great-aunt), my mother, my grandmother, and me. I was the only kid — just 10 years old when I sewed my first quilt — who was included in the circle. The relatives (sibling and cousins) of my shared generation were all boys — so the task of learning to quilt (a hobby that my family designated for women only) was bestowed solely on me. A product of homeschooling, I was clueless how uncool the sewing circle gig was, and so I loved it! Surrounded by such a warm embrace of maternity, I nestled into the open arms of feminine embrace.

Despite the better intentions of my many, capable teachers, my stitches never tightened or lined up neatly, and my handiwork never progressed beyond mediocrity (at best). I still hear the disapproving (albeit, loving and light-hearted!) voices of my aunts every time I attempt to re-sew a button or redo a hem. I'm no seamstress; I'm no quilter — but I do love quilts.



The Feminine Genius

I also love the topic of the Feminine Genius. If you are not familiar with the topic, let me give you a brief overview. The term “Feminine Genius” was popularized by St. John Paul II (most notably through *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *Redemptoris Mater*, and his Letter to Women), although the idea did not originate with him. The true origin of the Feminine Genius began with creation itself (the book of Genesis, from a literary standpoint). The more modern recognition of the Feminine Genius began with Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta), and was cited in the closing comments of Vatican II. “The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which ... women ... can do so much to aid humanity in not falling.”

The discussion surrounding Feminine Genius attempts to describe the created value (beauty, genius, etc.) of women. Women are created equally with men, but are not the same as men. More so, our feminine value does not describe what women do, but who women are — and this femininity is needed in our society, families, and Church.

Before anyone raises a red flag for over-generalizing, type-casting, or limiting the role of women, let me share a bit more on the tone of St. John Paul II's writing. While he shares many insights describing the Feminine Genius, he repeatedly states that much is still to be discovered — and he even “tasks” women of the third millennium to continue discovering the genius of the feminine charism. He distinctly avoids giving simplistic definitions (as in, “women are always fill-in-the-blank”). Rather, he affirms the diversity of women and the diversity of feminine expression. He speaks of women as image bearers of God — equal to and united with men, yet different from men.

Creation

As humans (male and female) we bear the image of God; we are all called to be reflections of God's central nature. In other words, who God is, we also are called to be. (Please do not look at that sentence in isolation; we are certainly not “gods” ourselves). Even in our perfect state — before the fall of humankind — we have always been mere creations, not the creator Himself. But like tiny snapshots, we were (and still are) meant to capture the likeness of God. Like portrait photographs, we are pictures of Someone, not the person Himself. We are like pictures taken from different angles or perspectives — unlike one another and also exactly like one another. This is the genius of human creation, which is both masculine and feminine — together and diverse.

THE QUARANTINE QUILT (CONTINUED)

Perhaps one of God's most central characteristics is that He creates (God is love, and love always creates). Even the most basic way to know the existence of God is by observing His creation (i.e. Where did we — and everything — come from, if not from God?). God's creative ability infinitely exceeds our human creative ability because (among other reasons) He is able to create from nothing. Obviously as humans, we can only create something out of something else; nevertheless, our creativity directly reflects divine creation.

Creativity

As bearers of God's image, creativity is central to our person-hood. (Keep in mind that creativity manifests itself differently from woman to woman and person to person — so don't feel like you are missing this trait if your Pinterest projects frequently end in disaster!) In my opinion, women are uniquely gifted in "something from nothing" creativity (not that we literally create from nothing, of course). Speaking from a physiological standpoint, women gestate humanity from humble (albeit invaluable and life-bearing) starts. Even if a woman undergoes physical duress or starvation during pregnancy, her body "automatically" gives nourishment to her growing baby first. She continues to create, giving her very self in imitation of the life-through-death Paschal Mystery.

Historically, women (great women as well as simple, "ordinary" women) have contributed much to their families and communities — even when working with meager provisions. A woman looks into a bare cupboard and manages to create a meal that will sustain her family. Our "Food Network" society typically does not value this sort of culinary achievement, but our families certainly do. I have always loved pies for this reason — not the beautiful pies on the front of magazines, but traditional pies made from over-ripe fruit or kitchen scraps, a whole lot of nothing baked into a whole lot of something, hearty and delicious.

I believe that women are particularly gifted creators in near-nothing environments. We are at our best when there is little to work with. We suffer well, we seamlessly draw near to others who are suffering, we wipe the face of our dying Jesus and find community with one another under His cross. Women, I think, do not just survive difficult times. Rather, we thrive; we create beauty, comfort, and community out of the "nothing" of crisis. I think it could be argued that the greatest works of feminine creation come from conditions of scarcity, not from abundance.

I am particularly drawn to the second Biblical creation account. Most of us are more familiar with the 6-day creation account in the first chapter of Genesis, in which God speaks the universe into existence (literally everything from nothing). In the second creation account (Gen.2), God creates from existing materials. God creates great things from lesser things; God creates life from non-life. I am captivated by this second creation account because God is fully capable of creating from nothing, yet in His great love for and connection to His creation, He chooses to use it (and us!) in expanding and cultivating His creation.

I also wonder at the second creation account because it describes the creation of woman — who was fashioned from the rib of man. Do we have an intrinsic genius toward creating beauty from near-nothing, as we ourselves were (metaphorically) created by such simple means?

Quarantine

We are currently living through a season of unprecedented, global devastation; lives and societies are being uprooted; many are facing isolation and despair. I believe that it is precisely in this context that women are invited to create beauty and sustenance, not from excess and comfort, but from the "nothing" of the pandemic.



THE QUARANTINE QUILT (CONTINUED)

Our Feminine Genius begs us not merely to “hunker down” and survive (although please do adhere to the CDC guidelines!). Rather, we are called to help others thrive by joining in the Paschal Mystery, by creating life through love, by giving our total selves. Throughout his writing on the Feminine Genius, St. John Paul II frequently returns to a quote from Vatican II; “[Woman] ... cannot fully find [her]self except through a sincere gift of [her]self” (Gaudium et Spes, 24; pronouns changed by author, from masculine/inclusive to feminine).

At the very minimum, most of us are now living without many of the comforts to which we had grown accustomed. Rather than disparaging these inconveniences, create something with the scraps. Look to the people in your own home first — if you are married, to your husband; if you are a mother, to your children. Perhaps your provisions are lean, but your time is likely plentiful. Make a gift of your presence — not your distracted, social-media-scrolling, news-feed-obsessing presence, but your full presence. Be still; be calm; be intentional in your familial interactions.



A note here to working moms — if you are trying to remote-work from home with young kids around, I totally get that you don’t have gobs of extra time on your hands! Find smaller ways to make yourself present. Listen to rambling stories, take time away from your computer, and kiss skinned knees. Your work will survive with a little less of you, but your family will not. Ask Jesus to show you how to give from your poverty of time, and ask Him to multiply your offering. After all, our Lord once fed a crowd of thousands from one boy’s sack lunch.

Beyond our inconveniences and discomforts, it is likely that many in our community will face loss and grief over the coming months. As women, I believe that we suffer well. In our maternity (a quality that St. John Paul II assigned to all women, not just mothers), we stretch rather than break. Sharing in the blood and water of Divine Mercy, we bear life through the pains of childbirth. By embracing and accepting our own experiences with suffering, we are also able to embrace others as they suffer. We create community in this shared experience, joy through sorrow, community through isolation.

Stitching it all together

I have spent the last 8 months working on a series of paintings (no, I’m not a professional painter, I’m just someone who enjoys painting in her free time). The series of paintings is based around quilts made by my paternal grandmother and my husband’s paternal great-grandmother. I realize that painting pictures of quilts is about as uncool and antiquated as the Sewing Circle experience of my childhood — but as a former home schooler, I’ve never aspired to cool-ness!

I paint pictures of quilts as a way to enter into the feminine story of my family — and also because I am a lousy quilter (which rules out the option of actually sewing them). I want to reference and reverence the Feminine Genius of the women who’ve come before me, but I am not called to repeat their genius; I’m called to live my own.

I love quilts because they are a metaphor for the Feminine Genius, and they beautifully demonstrate the something-from-nothing creative potential of women. A woman looks at a pile of discarded clothes and useless scraps, and she graciously receives the gift of “nothing.” With great sensitivity and intuition toward detail, she carefully recuts each piece of fabric to make it fit into a cohesive whole, highlighting the unique nature and beauty of each fabric. In her hands, discarded scraps are transformed into a patchwork of pieces that become cherished and necessary (can you imagine a quilt with one piece missing?). By her time and toil, her gift of self, she quilts together an heirloom treasure that will last through many generations. She creates something infinitely more beautiful and precious than the pieces from which it was made. She creates a representation of her own feminine heart — open, accepting, warm, self-sacrificing, maternal, and creative.

We look to the future with great uncertainty, with the fabric of our lives and society being suddenly torn apart. But despite the tearing, we can also rest in even greater certainty. In His infinite love, God is always creating. He is the only true something-from-nothing and life-from-dust creator. He is the master quilter, piecing together his people, and forming us into one (1 Cor, 12:12-27). He is calling us to work with Him, to join His Sewing Circle, and to unite our quarantine quilts, stitching them together with His.



National Prayer Vigil for Life Opening Mass - Homily Excerpt, Most Reverend Joseph F. Naumann, Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas, Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities

*The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Washington, D.C., January 23, 2020*

VIII Walking with Moms in Need – Year of Service

Also in November, the Bishops enthusiastically embraced an initiative entitled Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service as the most appropriate way to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of The Gospel of Life. Every diocese and every parish in the United States are encouraged to assess the pastoral and practical assistance currently available to pregnant moms and families.

We are also asking dioceses and parishes to evaluate the effectiveness of our communication of available resources to mothers experiencing a difficult pregnancy. The challenges can be immense for women with untimely pregnancies, especially women in poverty. According to statistics from abortion providers, women who choose abortion were poor, young and unmarried: 75% were low income, 60% were in their twenties, and 86% were unmarried. Imagine the adversities these women faced?

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and neighborhoods. While many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level, moms in need are best reached at the local level. We have well over 17, 000 Catholic parishes in the United States. Each parish is best able to identify the local pregnancy help resources that are currently available and to identify the potential gaps.

As Pope Francis reminds us, our parishes are called to be “islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference.” The 25th anniversary of The Gospel of Life gives us a wonderful opportunity to assess, expand and communicate the resources to pregnant moms and families in need. Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service officially commences March 25, 2020. I encourage each of you to help your parish implement this initiative. I also urge you to inquire with your local pregnancy resource center how you can help. Lives that we may not currently be able to protect by the law, we can rescue through love.

Our goal is not only to identify gaps or areas with insufficient resources, but then to take concrete steps to expand the help available to mothers, not only during the pregnancy but for months and even years after the child’s birth. We want to do everything possible to help both mother and child, not only survive but thrive.

In tonight’s Gospel, Mary provides us the perfect example as she travels a long distance over difficult terrain to accompany Elizabeth during the final months of her pregnancy. Each one of us can do something to help women in our communities who have given their Fiat by welcoming the child in their womb.



The results are in! On January 25th 200 parishioners attended “Enflame Ascension” a one day event to enflame our hearts for the Lord and our Catholic faith.

We sent a survey out afterwards and everyone gave very high marks to the day! Here is a sample of the comments received:

“Wonderful day! Suggest hosting this again!”

“Fabulous! Next time, I will encourage my husband to attend.”

“Powerful day.... Surprised how quickly our group bonded.”

“Lunch was great!”

“Amazing..... you should do this 3 or 4 times a year.”

“The whole day was great! This was a real spiritual boost in the middle of winter!”

“This was a great opportunity for renewal. I didn’t know what to expect but am so glad I came!”

“Great experience – very organized – speakers were exceptional.”

“Inspiring Day! Glad we had a chance to talk in small groups.”

“Do it again!!”



SAVE the DATE

Due to the overwhelming request to repeat this day we will do so in the Fall.
Mark your calendar now for SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 9:00AM–4:00PM Parish Hall
Look in the bulletin this fall for registration details.



Visitation

Mary, Queen, and Mother mine,
Greatest Mother of all time,
You said “yes” to God’s request,
And Jesus came to be our guest.

Humble maiden, lowly one,
You told God, “Your will be done.”
Your loving spirit well He knew,
Greatly He exalted you.

Knowing of your cousin’s need,
To her side you did proceed.
At your greeting, though asleep,
In her womb, the child did leap.

Mary, you brought Christ to John.
Your give we depend upon.
In our need, bring Christ to us,
Help us, Mother glorious.

You are Mother of the Church
You reign o’er the universe.
You brought Christ the world into,
Help us bring your Son there too.



Immaculate Mary

Hail Mary, Mother of God,
Mother of Jesus, our Lord,
Filled with God’s grace and his
love,
On us that grace is outpoured.

Mary, dear Mother of Jesus,
Sinless from your earthy start,
We are your sinful children,
We appeal to your motherly heart.

Pray for us now, dear Mother,
Blest like no other one.
Your example, teach us to follow,
Help us to follow your Son.

You always said, “Yes”
to the Father,
Grace always came from above.
You are our model believer,
Teach us to trust and to love.

Immaculate Mary, we love you,
Conceived without primal sin,
God always dwelling within you,
Our Model, our Mother, our Friend.

These poems are from Monsignor Charles McGlinn’s book, Poem Prayers, and were reprinted with his permission. Monsignor Charles began writing poems as conclusions to his homilies at Sunday Mass, usually summarizing three main points from each homily in the form of a prayer. The growing, positive response to the prayers by parishioners encouraged Monsignor Charles to publish his poems so they can be enjoyed beyond Sunday Mass.