

**December 25, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What's your favorite Christmas song? "O Holy Night" is without any hesitation my favorite religious Christmas song. I am not sure what draws me to this song. Perhaps it is memories of countless school Christmas concerts as a child. It was always the finale of the concert. Or it could be its soaring melodies. Whatever the reason, I am in good company, since year after year polling shows that it's consistently the favorite Christmas song each year. However, despite its popularity, we do not often find "O Holy Night" in the hymnal.

I find myself continually drawn to its lyrics, which are both a poetic and compelling summary of the Gospel.

**O holy night, the stars are brightly shining!**

This simple opening recalls the Creator God, who made heaven and earth, and then pronounced them good. As Catholics, we believe that the created world is in fact good. Everything that God made, He declared to be good (see Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). God's original plan is a plan of goodness, harmony, and peace. But as Catholics we also believe that this plan was wrecked.

**Long lay the world in sin and error pining.**

The great Catholic author, G.K. Chesterton wrote that he did not need any theological argument to be convinced of the Catholic teaching about sin and original sin. All he needed to do was to open the morning newspaper. I think we have this intuition that the world is not as it ought to be. That something is not quite right. And in this case our intuition is correct. God created the world to be good, and through sin, it has been shipwrecked. We can echo the words of St. Paul, "who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

**'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.**

**A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,**

**For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!**

Hope is truly thrilling. We gather to celebrate Christmas. We gather to celebrate that Jesus was born. Jesus is both Son of God and son of Mary. He has come to rescue us from sin and death. The child born in Bethlehem is the ultimate sign that God has not abandoned the world to sin and death. Does reflecting on the state of the world and the state of your soul leave you feeling weary? Then rejoice for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Christ has come to rescue us.

This is the summary of the Gospel (the kerygma if you want the technical term): 1) we were created in goodness, 2) we were lost through the disobedience of sin, and 3) we are rescued from sin and death by Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. This is truly the reason we rejoice as we celebrate his birth.

Christmas joy and blessings to you,

Father Bill

**December 18, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week's Gospel features Joseph. Although he is one of the most popular saints, Joseph is only mentioned a few times in the Gospels, and not even a single one of his words are recorded. Hence, he is called "Joseph the silent." But by his action Joseph powerfully speaks to us.

Joseph did not think that Mary was unfaithful to him. If he thought that Mary was unfaithful, the law of Moses would have required Joseph to denounce her infidelity. Although he did not understand what was the origin of Mary's pregnancy, he had a spiritual intuition that when he was in Mary's presence that he was standing on "holy ground." Thus, his hesitancy to bring Mary into his house was a posture of humility, not suspicion.

Joseph heard the words of the angel. Joseph obeyed the Angel. Joseph took Mary into his house. By receiving Mary, he was making a home not only for his wife, and also a home for her child. By welcoming Mary, he was welcoming Christ into his home. By his actions, Joseph serves as a model for us to imitate. Like him, we should welcome Mary into our homes and hearts. When Mary has a place in our homes, our families, and our hearts, Jesus finds a place in our homes, families and hearts.

Imagine the joys that Joseph experienced because of his life with Jesus and Mary! The devotional traditions of the Catholic Church highlight seven joys (and seven sorrows) of Joseph. We will ponder only a few. He would have been with Mary when Jesus was born. As such he would have been one of the first people to see the face of Jesus. He would have seen Jesus' face even before Mary did! As the foster father of Christ, he would have had the joy of naming him. Presenting Jesus and Mary in the temple forty days after his birth, as required by the law of Moses, he would have had the joy of receiving the news of redemption from the lips of Simeon the prophet.

And all this joy started with welcoming Mary into his home. One of the ways that we do this is by having a large image of Mary in a prominent spot in our homes. This serves as a visual reminder that this is in fact a Catholic home, and it also naturally becomes a focal point for the family's prayers and devotions. Prayers to Mary should also be part of family prayers. The old adage remains true: "the families that pray together, stay together." Pray the Angelus together, or at the very least the adults in the family should pray the Angelus. It is simple enough to invoke Mary at meal times by adding this short call and response at the end of the meal blessing: "Our Lady of Good Help... ..pray for us!" Lastly, begin praying the Rosary as a family. Begin with even one decade.

In Rome there is a little chapel near the Trevi fountain called, "Mary, Cause of Our Joy." And she truly is the cause of our joy because she brings Jesus to us. Joseph found this to be true, as he welcomed her into his home, and we can find it to be true too, by imitating him.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**December 11, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Saturday, December 17, we will be reviving an Advent custom that would have been very popular among the Germans Catholics who settled this area in the 1800s. We will gather in the morning to celebrate a "Rorate Mass."

The season of Advent falls each year in the dark month of December and it is a month when we see the general theme of the liturgical season being echoed in nature. Darkness has crept over the world, and is increasing each day. Yet, there is hope. Soon the days will begin to lengthen and the sun will conquer the night. The earth reveals that there is a light in this dark place and that Light reigns victorious.

The Church makes this truth more visible with an ancient tradition (often forgotten) called the "Rorate" Mass. This Advent Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary receives its name from the first words of the opening chant in Latin, "Rorate caeli," or in English "Shower, O heavens."

Traditionally, this Mass is celebrated in the dark, only illuminated by candlelight and typically just before dawn.

The symbolism of this Mass abounds and is a supreme expression of the Advent season. First of all, since the Mass is normally celebrated right before dawn, the warm rays of the winter sun slowly light up the church. If timed correctly, by the end of Mass the entire church is filled with light by the sun. This speaks of the general theme of Advent, a time of expectation eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Son of God, the Light of the World.

I hope that you respond to this invitation to participate in Mass and revive this beautiful custom. I pray that your hearts are open to the dawning Light that represents Christ the Light, and that you may be filled with His Light.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**December 4, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

**"PEACE ON EARTH"**

In this week's first reading, we hear of Isaiah pinning humanity's hope on the coming of Christ. Isaiah talks about judging the poor with justice; Isaiah talks about the band of justice around Christ's waist. We hear of a new, permanent peace from Isaiah. He talks about the wolf and the lamb being together, the calf and the lion, and he talks about the baby playing in the cobra's den.

This new and different peace that Isaiah describes to us is after Christ comes back the second time. We hear of wolves and lambs being together, lions and lambs, and babies playing with cobras. Now, Isaiah is writing figuratively, but this new peace that comes from Christ is because the brokenness of humanity, the divide caused by our sin, has been mended back together.

When Christ came into the world the first time, He gave us justice and peace by His sacrifice on the cross. Because of sin all of humanity was under a death penalty. Jesus took this penalty of death upon himself to fulfill justice to God. Our generous and merciful God covered our debt because He knew we were not capable. Jesus brought us back into relationship with God. He fulfilled justice and thereby gave us peace through salvation.

The Father sent the Son on a mission, and Jesus sends us on a mission. We are to bring justice and peace to the world by accepting and living the will of the Father. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." To do this, we have been given gifts at our Baptism and Confirmation. These are the same gifts that Isaiah names. They are the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. These are the tools needed to live justly and peacefully no matter what storm is going on in the world. These are the gifts that give us a peaceful spirit.

As we go through this Advent Season let us thank God for the justice and peace He brought us by His cross. Let's ask Him in prayer how we can best use the Gifts of the Spirit that He has given to us so that we can help others to know the peace of Christ. Let us place our hope in Christ's second coming where there will be a new justice and peace beyond anything we can imagine.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**November 27, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

**“HOLY MARY MOTHER OF GOD, PRAY FOR US SINNERS.”**

A while ago, Father Bill announced that in the upcoming year, he wanted to increase our devotion to Mary in the parishes and our devotion to the Rosary. I wrote a column about starting out simple with the Three Hail Mary devotion. Since that time, I have had the privilege to sit in a couple of RE classes and to see the students start their night with praying the Rosary together.

Watching and participating with the students in praying the Rosary was a good thing for me to see. I watched the little ones struggle to stay focused, to keep saying the words, or even sit up straight as they prayed their way around the decades. But they stuck with it. They have more stamina than some adults I know.

Well, watching those kids made me ask myself, “What’s the matter with me?” I told you before that the Rosary wasn’t one of my devotions, but watching those children who did their best and prayed the Rosary touched my heart and inspired me to begin to pray a Rosary a day.

There are many Catholic websites that explain the prayers and Mysteries of the Rosary. It is such a beautiful prayer because it makes us slow down. It helps us to think and pray on several levels. As we say the simple prayers of the Creed, the Our Father, and the Hail Mary, we get to know Christ better by contemplating the Mysteries. We pray the Rosary with special intentions in mind. We pray to end abortion, for the holy souls in purgatory, for our relatives in their time of need, and to ask for help for ourselves. Mary is the Mother of God, Mary is the Queen of Heaven, what better person to have intercede on our behalf. Even though we don’t always see the results of our prayers, we trust in God to deliver in His time and His ways.

For the last month, I have been praying a Rosary a day. I want to tell you that praying the Rosary has been a game changer for me. Now, I know the main purpose of praying the Rosary is not about me, but there have been some instantaneous results in my life. I can literally feel the stress and tension drain from my mind, my body. I am more at peace with myself and others. My inclination to do wrong, to sin, has diminished greatly, and these things I find amazing! I’m not saying that I have become a saintly person with no more need for the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That will never happen. Saying the rosary does not take the place of the rest of my prayer life, but by adding the rosary to my prayer life I feel like I’ve been selected for the bonus round. I can’t lose. All for an extra twenty minutes a day.

All I can tell you is that I have been a fool all these years. Those children convinced me to do something that no adult would have. So, I urge all of you who don’t pray the Rosary to give it a try. It will be the best 20 minutes of your day and will add peace to your life.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**November 20, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Miraculous Medal is considered to be a sacramental. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (par. #1678-ff), sacramentals are visible signs, either objects or actions, that dispose the faithful for receiving grace and render holy various occasions of daily life. Examples of other sacramentals include blessing oneself with holy water and blessed medals, crosses, and statues. The Miraculous Medal, just like all the sacramentals cannot be used in a superstitious way. Rather, sacramentals are visible reminders of our salvation through Jesus Christ so they must be used with devotion and faith.

The front of the Miraculous Medal depicts Mary as she appeared to St. Catherine Laboure. Mary's position above the world indicates that she is the Queen of heaven and earth. She fulfills the prophecy from Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will strike at your head and you shall bruise his heel." The woman's victory (Mary's victory) is shown in Revelation 12. St. Catherine asked what the rays of light symbolized, and Mary responded that these were the graces that God was giving to the world through her intercession. Not all the rays of light reached the world. According to Mary these were graces that God wished to give to the world, but the hearts of the faithful had grown too cold and too hard to ask for them.

The back of the medal shows a Cross interwoven with the letter M. M stands for the Holy Name of Mary, and being interwoven with the Cross, shows Mary's close association with the redemptive death of her Son on the Cross. This fulfills the prophecy that Simeon gave to Mary in the temple, "and behold, your heart too will be pierced by a sword" (Luke 2:35). The two hearts represent the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary and show their great love for us. The twelve stars have various meanings, they could represent the twelve stars that crown Mary's head or even the twelve apostles gathered around Mary and Jesus.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**November 13, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Miraculous Medal is a popular Catholic devotion to Mary. Mary appeared to a young religious sister, St. Catherine Laboure on November 27, 1830, at her convent in Paris. St. Catherine saw Our Lady standing on a globe, with dazzling rays of light streaming from her outstretched hands. Mary was framed by the inscription: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Mary instructed Catherine to have medals struck with the image that she saw and gave the promise that all who wear it would receive great graces.

The bishop of Paris gave permission for these medals to be made and distributed. Millions of medals were distributed throughout France and beyond. In very short order, people began to report miracles associated with wearing the medal, and for that reason it became known as the Miraculous Medal. These included a nearly paralyzed woman, who was returned to full health, and a blind child in Belgium receiving back her eyesight.

It is important to note that the faithful cannot use the Miraculous Medal superstitiously. All the miracles that have been attributed to the medal were always accompanied with persistent prayer, and conversion of life.

The Catholic Church used to celebrate a liturgical feast in honor of the Miraculous Medal on November 27, the anniversary of the apparition. St. Catherine Laboure's feast day is kept on November 28.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**November 6, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the Crusades, Catholics throughout Europe adopted the practice of ringing the church bells at morning, noon and evening. The bells served as a ready reminder to pray for the Christians who lived in the Holy Land under the oppressive Islamic Fatimid regime. Over time, the faithful started to pray three Hail Mary's when the church bells were rung at those times. This was the beginning of my favorite Marian devotion, the Angelus.

The Angelus is traditionally prayed at 6:00am, 12:00pm, and 6:00pm. It consists of three verses and responses, each followed by a Hail Mary. It is concluded with a short prayer. For me, it is a reminder to pause and pray. It reminds me that Jesus chose to dwell among us and that He gave us Mary as our spiritual Mother. In the morning, I conclude it by praying the Morning Offering. By midday, my thoughts and efforts are usually scattered, and this pause of prayer serves as a point to recollect my thoughts and refocus my efforts. Lastly, in the evening, I join the Angelus with a daily examination of the conscience.

It does not take a lot of time, but through Mary's maternal intercession, a commitment to praying the Angelus provides a good foundation for building a daily habit of prayer.

V. The Angel of the Lord declared onto Mary...

R. ...and she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary...

V. Behold, the handmaid of the Lord...

R. ...be it done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary...

V. The Word become flesh...

R. ...and dwelt among us.

Hail Mary...

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God...

R. ...that we may become worthy of the promises of Christ.



Let us pray: Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, thy Son, was made know to us by message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of the Resurrection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The second verse: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord... be it done unto me according to your word.," helps to unlock the mystery of my calling to the priesthood. Reflect upon Mary at that moment. She was a Jewish girl, at the edge of adulthood. She had hopes, plans, and dreams for her future. She was engaged/betrothed to Joseph. Yet, at this moment, an angel came with the most amazing message. God had a different plan for her. It is not that there was an-thing wrong with what she was planning. It was the normal life of a young Jewish woman to become a wife and mother. Yet, God was calling her to something greater, much, much greater. It was a sacrifice for her to say "Yes," but how much have we benefited from her "Yes"?

A young man, who God is calling to the priesthood, has the same choice to make. He has hopes, plans, and dreams of his future. Yet, if he feels God is calling him to be a priest, he is being invited to give himself to something greater. It is a sacrifice to set asides one's dreams, but it is also an invitation to become part of God's plan.

As I pray the Angelus three times a day, I make sure to offer up a prayer for the young men from our parishes. I pray that like Mary, they may be open to the invitation to become a priest. I pray that like Mary, they may have the courage to say "Yes."

Blessings, Father Bill

**October 30, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the biggest divides between Catholics and other Christians is the place that Mary has in the Christian Faith. From the very beginning, Christians have had a special love and devotion towards Mary, the Mother of Jesus. As the Faith developed, so did the Church's teachings and devotions about Mary. For most devout Catholics, the Church's treasury of Marian prayers and doctrines are the crowning glory of our religion.

Yet for Protestant Christians, the Catholic emphasis on Mary is the single greatest objection they have to the Catholic faith. They worry that raising Mary so high obscures the uniqueness of Christ. Protestant almost imagine that there is a rivalry between Christ and Mary, as if the honor we direct towards her would somehow diminish the worship we owe to Jesus.

How do we respond to this objection?

Imagine for a moment your favorite work of art that depicts Mary. It could be Fra Angelico's Annunciation or Michelangelo's Pieta. Or my favorite, the image of Mary on the tilma of Saint Juan Diego, which is the image of our Lady of Guadalupe. What you almost always notice is that Mary is rarely shown to be alone. She is always shown in relationship to Christ. She's either about to conceive Christ, as in the Annunciation. Or she is pregnant with Christ, as in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Or she is pointing towards Christ in a Nativity scene. These works of art visibly show us the center of the Church's teachings about Mary: Mary is important to us, because through her, Christ entered the world and through her, we are led back to Christ. Mary delights in leading people to Jesus, her Son.

Could the sun be jealous of the light of the moon? Of course it can't, since the moon's light is but a reflection of the sun's own light. In the same way, early Christian teachers taught that Mary is like the moon. She has no light of her own, but we honor her since she totally reflects the light of Jesus. She shines with his light, not her own.

There is not a rivalry between Jesus and Mary. All her beauty is a reflection of his glory. She was found to be great, not by insisting on her own will, but rather by saying, "be it done unto me according to your Word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary, lead us to your Son. Mary, lead our parish to your Son. Mary, lead all the Catholics who do not come to Mass back to your Son, who is really and truly present in the Eucharist offered at our altar.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**October 23, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Last week we discussed the historic reason why October is the month of the Rosary. In last week's homily, I shared how prayer can be a powerful spiritual weapon, and this was demonstrated at the Battle of Lepanto. There are many other historic examples of the Christian faithful using the Rosary as a powerful spiritual weapon.

Do you pray the Rosary? For generations the Rosary was the most popular prayer among Catholics. It is easy to learn. The twenty mysteries of the Rosary are a summary of the life of Jesus and Mary. It has a familiar rhythm that is consoling in moments of need. Generations of people have found the Rosary to be a powerful intercessory prayer. Yet, in the past few decades the Rosary has fallen out of fashion.

I was not taught how to pray the Rosary as a child. It was not prayed in my family, and I was not taught how to pray the Rosary in Religious Education. I did not learn how to pray the Rosary until I was in college. For me the Rosary started as a spiritual chore. At first, I found it to be monotonous, and I felt self-conscious praying the Rosary. Yet, it grew on me. And I have found praying the Rosary to be powerful. When someone asks me to pray for them, it is the Rosary that I most often turn towards. When my mind is unsettled and distracted, the Rosary draws me into prayer. Now the Rosary is no longer a chore, but an anchor of my prayer life, and something that I cannot live without.

The Rosary originated about 800 years ago. Pious legend tells us that the Blessed Virgin Mary, herself, appeared to St. Dominic and shared with him the Rosary. She encouraged all Catholics to pray the Rosary. Since that time almost all of the Popes and many saints have continually recommended the praying of the Rosary. It is a simple prayer, but it is "a spiritual lightning rod" that draws down grace through the intercession of Mary.

How do we pray the Rosary? Take the Rosary one step at a time. There are two components to praying the Rosary. The first are the vocal prayers, that is the Our Father's, Hail Mary's, and Glory Be's that are repeated. The Rosary beads are simply there to keep track of our prayers. The second component of the Rosary is the meditation upon the Mysteries. There are twenty mysteries, organized into four sets: Joyful Mysteries, Luminous Mysteries, Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Glorious Mysteries. If you do not currently pray the Rosary, focus on the vocal prayers first. Get yourself comfortable using the beads to keep track of your prayers. Muscles grow stronger and bigger through repeated and consistent exercises, and so the Rosary's power is found in repeated and consistent recitation.

Often people stop praying the Rosary because they do not feel like they are getting anything out of it. Remember first of all, the effect is found in consistency and commitment. Going to lift weights once will make no difference on the body. We will notice no difference by praying the Rosary once. But consistently lifting weights, transforms the body over time. Just so, consistently praying the Rosary transforms the soul. Second, remember that you are not praying the Rosary primarily for yourself. With each decade of the Rosary, pick out a specific intention in which to offer up that decade of the Rosary. Even if you do not feel like you are getting much of the Rosary, pray it with fervor because the person that you are praying for will be blessed. Pray the Rosary not primarily for yourself, but for others.

I will keep you in prayer.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**October 16, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

October has long been especially devoted to praying the Rosary. To find out why there is a connection between October and the Rosary, we need to look at the big picture. For centuries Christian Europe faced the very real prospect of being conquered by Muslim powers. At first the Islamic state attacked Europe from the south from across the Straits of Gibraltar. We often forget that Portugal and Spain were ruled by Muslim powers for centuries, and their rule was oppressively cruel. The Muslim threat from northern Africa faded, and new threat emerged from the east in present day Turkey, the heartland of the Ottoman Empire.

From its origins, the Muslim Ottoman Empire looked towards conquering Christian Europe. Everywhere the Ottoman Empire spread, Christians were cruelly persecuted. More than half of the New Testament consists of letters written by the Apostle Paul. These letters were mostly addressed to churches that were located in modern day Turkey. Where are the Christians in Turkey now? After eight-hundred years of persecution, forced emigration, and even genocide, it is not surprising that Christianity in Turkey is today a mere remnant of its former self.

In the 1500s, Europe was a house divided between the rebellion of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic powers. The Ottomans took advantage of the infighting by assembling a large navy fleet. They set their sights on conquering Italy. Just as Churchill would later describe Italy as the “soft underbelly of Europe,” the Ottomans saw Italy as their gateway to Europe. As the threat of invasion grew imminent, all of Europe, both Protestant and Catholic, faced the real prospect of conquest and occupation. Since all of Europe was at threat, Pope St. Pius the Fifth sent an appeal to all of Europe.

To almost no one’s surprise, the Protestant powers were apathetic to the Pope’s appeal. But with shame, many of the Catholic powers also proved to be indifferent to the threat. Perhaps remembering their own suffering under Islamic power, and having only been liberated the previous century, Spain sent reinforcements, along with Venice. Together they formed the Holy League. Even still, they were out-gunned and outnumbered.

Seeing how the appeal to the powers of the world had failed, the Pope made an appeal to Christian faithful. He appealed that they would take up not the weapons made of steel, but rather the weapon of the Rosary. Where kings and queens had failed, the common person was victorious.

The two great fleets met in a surprising manner on October 7, 1571, and engaged in battle. Each Christian ship flew under a banner depicting Our Lady. Both sides lost ships and men. However, contrary to everyone’s surprise, as the smoke settled, nearly the entirety of the Ottoman fleet was destroyed. The thousands of kidnapped Christians who were enslaved by the Ottomans and forced to row in their galleys were liberated. And Europe was saved (for now). The commander of the Holy League, Don Juan of Austria, immediately recognized the miraculous nature of the victory. Instead of keeping the trophies of victory for himself, he deposited them in the church of Our Lady of Victories in Rome. The Ottoman

banners captured at that battle were hung in that church. They were only recently removed due to political correctness.

In thanksgiving, the Pope established October 7 as the liturgical feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, and asked that the whole month of October be dedicated to the Rosary.

There are spiritual lessons to be drawn from this history, but those lessons will be saved for upcoming columns.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**October 9, 2022**

**Year of Mary**

**October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Most Catholic churches are celebrating the Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Bishop Ricken has asked that the parishes of the diocese remember the apparition of Mary to the young immigrant girl, Adele Brise, on October 9, 1859.

Ever since the earliest centuries of the church, there have been thousands of people that have reported that Mary has appeared to them in a supernatural manner. These appearances are referred to as apparitions. The church authorities assess every claimed apparition. Most are never formally approved. Some are determined to be false, mistaken, or fraudulent. Only a few are determined to be “worthy of belief.”

Some of the most famous approved apparitions of Mary include Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531, Mexico), Our Lady of Lourdes (1858, France), Our Lady of Knock (1879, Ireland), and Our Lady of Fatima (1917, Portugal). Often Mary speaks to the visionary, who sees her and shares messages that call for increased prayer, calls to conversion, and a desire for peace. Apparitions of Mary are signs of Mary’s ongoing motherly care and concern for the Church and the Christian faithful. Often her messages are comforting, but sometimes, like a good mother, she offers correction to behaviors or attitudes that lead people away from the Gospel of her son, Jesus.

The only approved apparition of Mary in the United States is located in the diocese of Green Bay and is only about an hour drive away from these parishes. On October 9, 1859, Adele Brise, a teenaged immigrant girl from Belgium, was walking from her home to the closest Catholic church. This was a distance of about ten miles. As she was walking to church, she saw a mysterious woman standing between two trees. The presence seemed supernatural and mysterious. At that time, the woman did not speak, but left an impression on Adele. After Mass, Adele asked her priest about this appearance, and he told her that if she saw the woman again, she should ask her what she wanted. As Adele was returning from Mass, again she saw the mysterious woman, and asked her, “In the name of God, what do you want?”

The lady responded, “I am the Queen of Heaven, who prays for sinners...” She also extorted Adele and her companions to penance and conversion, along with telling them to teach children the catechism, how to sign themselves, and how to properly prepare for the sacraments.

After this apparition, Adele devoted herself to teaching children. She sometimes journeyed as far as fifty miles on foot to teach the basics of the catechism to immigrant children. Her example attracted a small community of followers and inspired the construction of a chapel on the site of the apparition. Over the years this appearance of Mary became known as Our Lady of Good Help. This shrine still exists and was formally approved by Bishop Ricken on December 8, 2010.

Many miracles have been associated with the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, and many people find it as a place of peace to visit and pray. It is a spiritual treasure for the faithful people in the diocese of Green Bay and the whole state of Wisconsin. If you have not visited, take the time to visit and to pray.

Blessings,

Father Bill



**October 2, 2022**

**Hear to Serve**

**THREE HAIL MARY DEVOTION**

Father Bill has said one of the things he would like to see in our parishes is an increase in our devotion to Mary. This is a most worthy goal to achieve. A priest once told me, "If you have the Mother of God going to bat for you, you can't go wrong. Now, go say three Hail Mary's." You know that priest was spot on.

The number one way to increase our devotion to Mary is by saying the Rosary. It is such a powerful prayer. Truth be told, it would be a wonderful thing to pray a daily Rosary. Getting into the daily habit of saying the Rosary can be difficult. We tell ourselves that we are pressed for time, can't seem to concentrate, or that we don't have all the prayers or mysteries memorized. There are many excuses, and the devil hates for us to say the Rosary, and he will do anything to stop us.

Maybe, the best way to strengthen our devotion to the Blessed Mother is to start simple. There is a short devotion begun by St. Mechtilde, a Benedictine Mystic nun who lived in the early 1200's. The Blessed Virgin appeared and told St. Mechtilde to say this devotion twice daily, once upon rising and then again before bed. Mary promised that she will appear at the hour of our death, and our souls will be filled with heavenly consolation.

Mary told St. Mechtilde to say the first Hail Mary to honor God the Father. It was by the Father's omnipotence, (unlimited power) that Mary was raised above every other created creature. At the hour of our death, the power of God the Father will keep hostile powers away from us.

The second Hail Mary is to honor God the Son who communicated His inscrutable wisdom to Mary. At the hour of our death, Mary will bring us the wisdom of her Son so that all darkness, ignorance and error will be dispelled from us.

The third Hail Mary is in honor of God the Holy Spirit who filled Mary's soul with love, tenderness and mercy. At the hour of our death, Mary will ask the Holy Spirit to change the bitterness of death into sweetness and delight.

After each Hail Mary say, "By thy pure and Immaculate Conception O' Mary, may my body be pure and my soul holy."

Does this devotion take the place of saying the Rosary? Not at all. But if we are not in the habit of saying the Rosary this may be just the devotion to start us on the path. Remember, starting out small is better than not starting at all.

Let us follow the advice of our very own pastor, and increase our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and ask her to go to bat for us. Let us pray, Hail Mary ....

Viva Christo Rey

Deacon Gary

## **September 25, 2022**

Year of Mary

October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Both of our parishes will be celebrating a “Year of Mary” from October 1, 2022 to December 8, 2023. These two dates were chosen, since October is the month traditionally focused on the Most Holy Rosary, and December 8 is the great feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. So, the year will go from one Marian feast to another. This year is obviously longer than twelve months, but that is by design. Good things need time to develop and to take root, so a few extra months will be time for extra blessings.

As pastor of these parishes, I see a lot of good. These parishes could not operate without the commitment of so many volunteers in our liturgical ministries, outreach, religious education, and fundraising. People are generous with their financial resources, and this literally keeps our lights on and our building heated. There is clearly a devotion to these parishes. However, parishes are more than buildings and activities. The parish’s primary mission is to foster an encounter between your heart and the heart of Jesus. The parish’s job is to help our people build a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We can, and we must do better at both of these.

So, there is a need for renewal at a spiritual level. Now, I have only been a pastor for about a year, so I look at the example of pastors that have more experience than I do. When I look at pastors, who have successfully led renewal efforts in their parishes, there are four common attributes: 1) a renewal of Marian devotion, 2) a Eucharistic revival, 3) a return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (a.k.a. Confession), and 4) a recommitment to the Word of God. As a group, the bishops of the United States have declared a three-year Eucharistic revival for the entire country. We will be participating in this revival. We will also look at the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Word of God at their proper time.

But now we begin with Mary.

Mary is first of all the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God. Children do not comprehend this, but parents do. Parents love their children, even more than the children love themselves. Just so (and even more), Mary (as our spiritual mother) loves us even more than we love ourselves. Mary desires to have us grow in faith even more than we do. Mary wants to draw us closer to her son, more than we realize. This is why pastors and saints throughout the history of the Catholic church have found that Mary is always the beginning and the heart of a genuine Catholic renewal.

During this year of Mary, you should notice a greater emphasis placed on her. Most of my bulletin columns will focus on Mary. We will look at stories of Mary from the Gospel, traditional Marian prayers and hymns, apparitions of Mary, and Mary’s role in Christian history. The Rosary will be prayed before every Mass. The choir has been asked to end each Mass with a Marian hymn. Each month there will also be a focus on a Marian devotion.

I ask that you pray. Pray the Angelus, which is traditionally offered at morning, noon, and night. Pray the Rosary. If you are not familiar with the Rosary, begin with one decade a day for a week, and each week add a decade. Soon it will be an indispensable part of your life.

This endeavor may seem small, and there might not be a lot of “buy-in.” But this is not discouraging to me. We should not be afraid of small beginnings. There are about 1.36 billion Catholics in the world today. This is roughly 17% of the world population. Catholicism is the largest religion in the world.\* Catholicism is also growing. And it had a small beginning. It began with Mary, a poor girl, living in a small insignificant town, and saying a simple phrase, “Be it done unto me according to your word.” Catholicism started small, but now grows. For the renewal of our parishes, we follow Mary’s example: we begin small, and through the intercession of Mary and the power of the Holy Spirit, it will grow.

Mary, Cause of our Joy... ...pray for us!

**September 18, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1

We have covered three of the four P.A.R.T.s of prayer: praising, repenting and thanking. We will now look at asking.

Asking God for something is usually the first type of prayer that we learn as a child, and for many people asking is the primary way to pray. Although it is the prayer of a child, it is not juvenile. There is more depth to asking God for something than making a mere request. By asking God for a favor, we are implicitly acknowledging both his power and his goodness. Afterall, why would we make a request of God if we did not think that he had the ability to grant the request? Similarly, why would we make a request of God if we did not think that he loved us and desired to bless us. So asking God for a favor is a powerful confession of faith. Asking God for a favor is also a sign of humility, since we need to acknowledge that we are in need of something that we are unable to provide for ourselves.

There should be a balance between the different types of prayer. There is a danger that prayers of petition and intercession become a disproportionately large part of our prayer. We all have a friend who only ever contacts us when they are asking us for a favor. We all understand that friendship is more than exchanging favors. It is the same for our relationship with God. We should avoid being the friend that only talks to God when we are in need of a favor. God certainly enjoys receiving our requests. Afterall, the “Lord’s Prayer” is a series of seven petitions. But our prayer should also include a balance of praise, thanks, and repentance.

What about when God does not answer our prayers? The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that we have to remember that God’s answers to our prayers are meant to build up His Kingdom on earth. Afterall, we pray “your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven.” So when we raise a petition in prayer that is not heard, often it is because it is not consistent with His Kingdom.

Blessings,

Father Bill

\*P—Praise

A—Ask

R—Repentance

T—Thanks

**September 11, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1

“I will rise and go to my Father,” are the words of the Responsorial Psalm today. These are the words of the prodigal son from today’s Gospel. These are words of repentance.

Repentance is one of the four main “P.A.R.T.s”\* of prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the first movement of the prayer of petition is to ask for forgiveness (see paragraph 2631). The catechism continues that repentance is a sign of humility that brings us into the Communion that exists between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

In today’s Gospel this is shown by the prodigal son. He shows us the stages of repentance. First he recognizes his wretched state, “here I am dying of hunger.” This is true humility. Second, he takes responsibility for his actions, as he prepares to tell his father, “I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.” Third, he returns to his Father’s house. He leaves behind the filth of the pigsty.

This is the very heart of repentance. Repentance is not simply sorrow for our sins, but the willingness to change. The word used for repentance in the Gospel can also be translated as conversion, or even transformation. So the son is willing to change his circumstances He will be transformed from a son to a slave, and he accepts being changed from a state of filth to a state of redemption.

Lastly, being embraced by the Father and being restored. “His father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.”

Do we have the humility to admit that we are in need of God’s mercy? Of course the literal meaning of the word Gospel is “the Good News.” The Good News is that Christ suffered and died to pay the price for our sins, and rose again on the third day to bring us to new life. But as the great preacher and bishop, Fulton Sheen, stated, “There is no reason to talk about the Good News, if at first we do not talk about the ‘Bad News.’” This is the “bad news” of sin and death. Christ is our Savior because we are in need of being saved.

Do we take responsibility for our decisions and actions? Do we accept the consequences of our decisions and actions? Recall the words that we use at the Penitential Act at the beginning of Mass, “I confess to Almighty God... that I have sinned... through my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault...” It is a sign of maturity when someone takes responsibility for their actions. It is also the first stage of growth.

Are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us? It is not enough to be sorrowful for our sins, but we have to be willing to leave the “pigsty” of our sinfulness. This is often the sticking point in spiritual growth. The son in today’s Gospel was willing to be a slave. He was practically a slave as he tended the swine. The son wanted to stay the same. But it was not enough for the Father to accept him as a slave, he had to transform him from a slave to a son. The Father sends the Spirit to transform us from a slave to sin, to be adopted as a son or daughter of God the most high.

Like the Father in today's Gospel, God is looking for our return. The moment that we begin to cooperate with the movement of the Holy Spirit, the Heavenly Father seeks to embrace us in his grace and mercy. Repentance is not a popular subject in today's culture. It was probably never a popular subject. But it is a necessary first step in growing as Christians, and often the first serious step in receiving the joy that Christ wishes to give us.

\*P—Praise, A—Ask, R—Repentance, and T—Thanks

Blessings,

Father Bill

**September 4, 2022**

Hear to Serve

**“LOVE YOUR ENEMIES”**

In the Gospel of Matthew (18:21-22) Peter asked Jesus, “How many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times? Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.”

As we look around our world, in our own country, and yes even in our own Catholic Church, we can see enough anger to stretch around the world once over. But what about on a more personal level? Are we suffering from the deadly sin of anger? We all have grievances with coworkers or family. We may have disputes or disagreements with people in our own parish or diocese. We’ve been hurt, sometimes seriously, and sometimes not so seriously. Sometimes we just don’t like the direction of the decisions being made. But the question is how we deal with the differences of opinion. How do we channel our anger? Do we let it fester until it is an uncontrollable rage? How many times have we found ourselves going through scenarios in our head? We prepare a verbal retort to cut that person down to size and to put them into their proper place so they will never dare treat us like this again. These kinds of fantasies can take up a good part of our time and not allow us to do more productive things.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us the parable about the servant who wasn’t able to pay back his master the debt he owed, but the master had compassion and forgave his debt. However, when that servant’s servant asked for more time to pay back a debt, the servant had him thrown in prison. (Do you see the irony here?)

Jesus is telling us that we must forgive our enemies’ debts and to forgive them their trespasses. We are to forgive others as God forgives us. We cannot make others squirm and earn their way into our good graces. We have to freely forgive and love, just as God (The Master) compassionately forgives and loves us.

Why was the first servant so uncaring to his own servant? He had just experienced the generosity, compassion, and love of the master. Why didn’t he extend that to his own servant? Maybe he had the attitude that he was owed that forgiveness for all his years of good work and faithful service. That’s a mistake we cannot make with God. God owes us nothing, we are deserving of nothing from God. It doesn’t matter how often we spend time in church, how many rosaries we say, or how many of the poor we serve. We will never reach that plateau of, “I’ve earned God’s reward--He owes me this.”

Don’t we find ourselves treating others like this when it comes to forgiveness? We think that the other party has not done enough to make up to us. They have not earned our forgiveness. Jesus tells us to, “Love your enemies” and to forget about revenge and payment for damages. Jesus tells us, “Will the good of our enemies” and to heal our relationships with those that have hurt us.

It is hard to forgive, especially that seventy-seventh time! A good place to start is with daily prayer for the people that have offended us. Let us remember that God loves and forgives us with a mercy that we cannot earn and do not deserve. We need to pass this along.

If we get caught up in that deadly sin of anger, we become prisoners of the devil. Let us instead, as St. Paul tells us, become a prisoner of Christ. Let us remember the words of our most perfect prayer from Jesus, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Let us bring back the lost art of forgiveness.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary



**August 28, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

We continue to learn about prayer and how to pray. It has been a few weeks, so a brief review: there are four types of prayer: 1) Praising, 2) Asking, 3) Repenting, and 4) Thanking. These four types can be remembered with the acronym P.A.R.T.

Today we will look at prayers of thanksgiving. The catechism offers only two rather short paragraphs about prayers of thanksgiving (#2637-8), but this does not mean that these prayers are not important. The catechism teaches that thanksgiving should characterize all the church’s prayer, and in offering thanks, the church “reveals and becomes more fully what she is.” The word Eucharist can literally be translated as the great thanksgiving.

There are parts of Mass that are specifically focused on offering praise to God, such as singing the Gloria. There are parts of Mass that are specifically focused on offering repentance to God, such as the “Penitential Act” at the beginning of Mass. And there are parts of Mass specifically focused on offering prayers of intercession, such as the “Prayers of the Faithful.” But it does not seem that there is a specific part of Mass specifically focused on offering prayers of thanksgiving.

This is because an attitude of gratitude should permeate every part of Mass.

When we praise God, we are also offering Him thanks for revealing Himself to us and entering a relationship with us. When we repent, we should offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of redemption through the blood shed on the cross. When we offer intercessions, we come to God with confidence since he has already answered so many of our prayers. And as we ask for more blessings, we should also offer thanks for the prayers already answered.

But even if there is not a part of Mass focused on thanksgiving, thanksgiving is mentioned numerous times throughout the Mass. It is a frequent theme of the opening collect prayer. Thanksgiving is one of the themes that the Apostle Paul wrote on frequently so we will often hear it as part of second reading. Almost every Preface begins with these words, “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father...”

You’ve heard those words countless times, but have you ever thought about what they claim? “It is our DUTY and our SALVATION to give you thanks...” At each Mass we recognize that we have an obligation to give thanks to God. When I was a child, I could not start playing with my Christmas presents until I had already written my thank you cards to those who gave them. It was a duty to give thanks for the gift before the gift could be enjoyed. So, it is the same with the gifts that come from God. Often, we do not enjoy his blessings because we have not given thanks for the blessings he has given us. It is a startling claim that it’s not just our duty to give thanks but giving thanks will be our salvation.

In short, by thanking God, we are saved.

Take some time this week to reflect on the blessings that you have received. Bring that list to Mass with you. And as we prepare to offer the Eucharist, join your thanksgivings with the church’s one great thanksgiving. It will lift your heart, and draw you close to the heart of God.

Blessings,  
Father Bill

**August 21, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

The bulletin this week contains an invitation for each of you to participate in a “day-long retreat” on prayer. The great Pope, St. John Paul II, often talked of his desire that parishes become “schools of prayer.” This day is intended to respond to that desire.

The inspiration for this day also comes from my own personal experience. During my freshman year of college, I was required to take an introductory course on theology. It was during that course that my desire to pray was awakened. I wanted to pray, but when I went to pray, I realized that I did not know how to pray. I would recite the prayers that I had learned as a child, but these words seemed routine. I would pray in my own words, but there did not seem to be any connection to someone else. But my desire to pray was strong, and I even took a class on spiritual theology. This class talked a lot about what prayer was, but it did not teach me how to pray.

I think many people have this experience of prayer. They want to pray but feel that prayer should be more than what they are currently experiencing.

What I desired in my prayer was a sense of God’s presence, and a connection between my heart and his heart.

Towards the end of college, I started to participate in Catholic Youth Expeditions (CYE). Seeing others pray, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, gave me an example to follow. I learned by watching and imitating. Later on, as part of my seminary training, I was sent to a program called the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF). This program focused its instruction on how to pray and paired me with a spiritual director that personally coached me on prayer.

My experience in both these programs started to fill that desire for prayer to be something more than words. I started to feel God’s presence and I started to feel connected to him. These programs were a start and a foundation, but I also feel like there is a lot to learn to deepen my own prayer.

Can you relate to this desire to have a sense of God’s presence, and to building a connection between your heart and his? I believe that many people have the desire to really feel connected with God. My hope is that this “day-long retreat” will not just be a discussion on what prayer is but rather a mentoring on how to pray. My hope is that the participants in this “day-long retreat” will have the foundation to begin building a solid and nourishing connection with God.

The details about this day can be found on a flier contained in this bulletin. If you have additional questions, Patty Wilhelm can answer your questions. But I encourage you to participate in this retreat.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**August 14, 2022**

**“Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus”**

**Hebrews 12:2**

It's been over thirty years since I was in the kitchen of my grandma's house in Valders. But even as the years have passed my memories remain vivid. In that kitchen, next to the pantry door, hung a depiction of the Last Supper. As a child, I noticed that my grandma often looked at that picture. She would say that she would have to look towards Jesus. There was such a stillness on her face when she would look towards Jesus that even as a child I could tell that she was speaking to Jesus heart to heart. I do not know what she would say to him, but knowing that she was a prayerful woman, I can imagine that when she felt a moment of sadness, she would look towards Jesus for consolation. When she was in a moment of frustration or worry, she would look towards Jesus in prayer and supplication. When she was feeling grateful, she would look towards Jesus with thanksgiving.

My grandma's practice of looking towards Jesus is echoed in today's second reading from the letter to the Hebrews. “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). According to the Letter to the Hebrews, the simple practice of looking towards Jesus relieves us of the burden of sin and temptation, and is a strong encouragement to persevere in the faith. Looking towards Jesus motivates us to continue running the race towards eternal life.

There are a few simple ways to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Do you have an image of Jesus, preferably a crucifix prominently displayed in your home? Our Catholic ancestors had the wisdom to know that what we saw with the eyes formed the thoughts of our mind and the feelings of the heart. So like my grandma's home there was usually a prominent image of Jesus and Mary in each room of the house and a crucifix above each bed. Every time a glance falls upon these sacred images, it reminds us that he is present, and that we can cast our cares upon him. In a moment of frustration or temptation, a glance towards the Cross provides encouragement. These images also become a natural focus for our prayers, and by focusing our eyes on the Cross, the attention of our hearts and minds focus on the Lord.

The Gospels show us who Jesus is. St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.” A little time should be taken each day to read from the Gospels. A Christian should be reading from the Gospels continually, until the words and actions of Jesus become ingrained in our mind and heart. Priests are never lacking in Bibles. But of the many Bibles that I own, the one I cherish most dearly is a small orange copy of the New Testament. It was my grandmother's pocket Bible. She read from it each morning, but not only that she had it with her always, and she would often pull it out to read for a few moments when she was waiting in line. In the age of the smart phone, there is never an excuse to not have a Bible with you. Have a dedicated hard copy of the Bible for routine morning reading. Put it on the kitchen table at night, so it is already ready for having coffee with Jesus. But also have a Bible on your phone, and each time you are waiting, instead of looking at the news, or Twitter, or Instagram, take a few moments to read a few verses.

A third way to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is to come to the church to pray. Of course you can pray anywhere, but the church is the only place that is dedicated to prayer. When I struggle to pray, I go into the church, and like the Letter to the Hebrews, I am reminded that I am surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. The images of the saints remind me that I am part of the "Communion of saints." The church is where we gather to pray, and even though I might go there to pray individually, going to the church reminds me I am also surrounded by a community of Christians. But most importantly, each Catholic church has the little red vigil candle next to the tabernacle. It burns brightly, especially when the lights of the church are off and draws me towards the Eucharistic presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. No one but Jesus can lead along the path of faith. So let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Blessings, Father Bill

**August 7, 2022**

Hear to Serve

**HELP MY UNBELIEF**

Every now and then I like to talk about certain sacraments in the Church that don't get the proper reverence that they deserve. I truly believe it is important that we not only participate in the sacraments but that we believe in the theology of the sacraments that we receive. Some years ago a survey was done and it turns out that 69% of Catholics believe that the bread and wine are only symbols. They don't believe in the True Presence of Jesus the Christ in the bread and wine.

This is a very sad fact indeed because everything we do as Catholics centers around this great gift that Jesus gave us. Jesus promised that we could have a living relationship with Him. That living relationship starts with the Eucharist.

We cannot feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or give drink to the thirsty in the name of Christ if we cannot even have faith in the words Christ told us about the Eucharist. We believe Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead when He said, "Little girl, I say to you arise." And she got up. (MK 5: 41-42). We believe Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, when He said, "Lazarus come out!" And Lazarus came out of the tomb (JN 11: 43-44). Then why don't we believe the words of Jesus? He tells us, "Amen, Amen, I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you do not have life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." (JN 6:52-54).

You see, the words of Jesus alter reality. Jesus' words altered reality when he raised the dead, and Jesus' words altered reality at the Last Supper when He gave us the gift of His Body and Blood.

During the Mass, as Father Bill calls down the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord, Father is acting In Persona Christi. Father is acting in the person of Christ. It is Jesus speaking through Father. Jesus' words are changing reality at every Mass. Transubstantiation (the changing of the bread and wine), Jesus in body, soul, and divinity overtakes the presence of the bread and wine without changing the physical appearance. It is hard to comprehend, but that's where we need faith in Jesus and His words.

Now the world isn't going to help us understand this, but there are things we can do to help us with our unbelief. Do we genuflect to Christ present in the tabernacle when we go into a pew and when we leave church? When Father Bill raises the Host and the Chalice, we should be repeating the cry of Thomas when he saw the risen Christ. In our minds we should be saying, "My Lord and my God." Do we read Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to enter our minds and hearts? Do we read other teachings by the Church on the Eucharist? Do we spend time sitting before Jesus in the tabernacle? Do we attend Holy Hour? We can also say these words from Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

I cannot stress enough to you, my brothers and sisters, how important it is to believe in this Sacrament. This is at the core of all that we do. It is through the sacrament of the Eucharist that we have an intimate relationship with Jesus and eternal life.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**July 31, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Hopefully you have noticed in the bulletin that our parishes will begin offering Mass and Devotions on the First Friday and First Saturday of each month. The First Friday and First Saturday devotions have a long history in Catholic spirituality.

The First Friday of the month is marked by special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion originates with the visions that St. Margaret Mary had of Jesus. During those visions Jesus shared the following words:

“In the excess of the mercy of my Heart, I promise you that my all-powerful love will grant to all those who will receive Communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die in my displeasure, nor without receiving the sacraments; and my Heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour.”

For our observance of First Friday, Mass will be offered at 8:00am at St. Gregory, and will be followed by an hour Eucharistic Adoration. During Eucharistic Adoration there will be time for silent private prayer, but there will also be traditional prayers, such as recitation of the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and prayers of entrusting ourselves, our families, and the needs of the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

While the First Friday of the month is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the First Saturday of the month is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart has been linked to devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus beginning with scripture. In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus was presented in the temple, the holy man, Simeon, prophesied to Mary, “and sword shall pierce through your heart, too,” (Luke 2:35). Through her love and devotion, Mary's heart shares in the suffering of her son.

The popularity of devotion to Immaculate Heart of Mary grew after Mary appeared to three shepherd children at Fatima in 1917, and told them, “I will assist at the hour death with all the graces necessary for the salvation of their souls all who, for five months, on the first Saturday of each month, confess their sins, receive Holy Communion, recite the Rosary, and keep Mary company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the fifteen\* mysteries of the Rosary, all offered in a spirit of reparation.”

For our observance of First Saturday, Mass will be offered at 8:00 am at Holy Trinity, and will be followed by an hour of Eucharistic Adoration. During Eucharistic Adoration there will be time for silent private prayer, but also the recitation of the Rosary, the recitation of the Litany of Loreto, along with a prayer for reparation. Since this Mass will be offered in the morning, it will not fulfill the Sunday obligation.

These are traditional devotions, and many people will even consider them to be old-fashioned. Jesus taught in the Gospel of Matthew, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (13:52). Embracing the old, does not reject what is new. An old tree is often able to survive a drought and even support new growth, because its roots reach deep water at greater depths. In much the same way,

much of the growth in the Catholic Church, especially among young people, has been found in parishes that embrace and promote traditional devotions and practices.

Please prayerfully consider participating in these devotions. Even if you are not able to come to church, please offer prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary on the First Friday and First Saturday of each month.

Blessings,

Father Bill

\* When Mary appeared at Fatima, there were only fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, the Joyful, the Sorrowful, and the Glorious. Pope St. John Paul II added the Luminous Mysteries to the Rosary in 2002, bringing the total number of mysteries to 20.

**July 24, 2022**

Hear to Serve

**BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS**

As you listen to the second reading from St. Paul to the Colossians you may scratch your head and wonder what is being said. You see, as St. Paul wrote this to the Colossians, he had not yet been to visit them, but St. Paul had been informed of bad teachings given to the Colossians. In fact, all of chapter two in the Letter to the Colossians warns the Colossians to be on guard against teachings that are more concerned with human traditions and worldly values, instead of following Christ.

St. Paul told the Colossians, and he tells us, that at our Baptism we die with Christ, and we rise with Him. St. Paul reminds the Colossians not to let outward things such as circumcision and transgressions keep them from Christ. St. Paul is telling them that despite their former days as pagans, when they indulged in the sins of the flesh, that God has raised them to new life with Christ in Baptism. St. Paul said, "Obliterating the bond against us with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, He removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross." St. Paul is telling the Colossians that God has cancelled the indebtedness of our sins by the Cross of Christ.

We have seen only a small part of St. Paul's letter to the Colossians in today's reading, but it's a very important part. It amazes me that something written so long ago to people that don't even exist anymore still has importance for us today. It's not hard to be led astray in today's world. The world is full of false teachers and empty promises. Too often, we forget that Christ is all that matters. False teachers tell us to graft ourselves onto the attention-getting trend of the moment. They encourage us to focus on ourselves instead and our momentary happiness rather than on the teachings of Christ which are life-giving and bring eternal happiness.

So beware, we must be careful not to be led astray by current false teachers that want us to focus on their newly made up morals and values. Instead, focus on the great gifts of Baptism and the Cross which graft us to Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary



**July 17, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

P. to Praise – bless, adore and praise

A. to Ask – petition and intercede

R. to Repent

T. to Thank

As we move through the parts of prayer, we begin with Praise.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2639), the prayer of praise “recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory.” The simple prayer, “Glory be to Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, world without end. Amen.” is a simple prayer of praise. Many of the psalms are expressions of praise. Also many of the church’s best loved hymns are songs of praise, such as “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” and “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

What’s the point of praise? The other P.A.R.T.s of prayer have a clear purpose. We ask God for things because we recognize a need and believe that he can provide. We repent because anyone who engages in an honest self-examination knows the need for God’s mercy. We thank God because we recognize that God has blessed us, and the proper response to receiving a gift is to express gratitude. But praise doesn’t seem to have a point, so why devote a portion of our prayer time to praise? The first reason to praise is because God deserves it. The second reason is that praise is the most common form of prayer found in the Bible, and the most common way that Jesus prays. Praising also helps us to grow in the virtues of reverence and humility.

Offering praise to God is easy. We have the simple prayer, “Glory be...” discussed above, along with many psalms that offer examples of prayers of praise. For many people their prayers of praise arise spontaneously from their hearts and lips. Practically speaking, I think it helps to sing the praises of the Lord. St. Augustine is often quoted as saying, “he who sings, prays twice.” And he is right, singing while praying has a powerful way of lifting the heart and mind to prayer.

There is a certain effect that praising the Lord has in our life. When my prayer begins to feel dry, I begin to increase the portion of my prayer dedicated to praise. Even if the praises remain silent and only expressed in my heart, I find that praising brings life to my prayers. Praising reconnects me to the Spirit that is the well-spring of true prayer. Similarly, praising also has a way of strengthening the virtue of Faith. Praising is an important, perhaps the most important part, of prayer. However, it is often the most neglected part of prayer. Lift your heart in praise during your prayers starting this week. Pay attention to how it affects your heart and soul.

Blessings, Fr. Bill

**July 10, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

We continue our series on learning to pray.

Why do we pray? Or in other words, what’s our reason or purpose for praying?

If you ask a child to describe prayer, they will usually say that praying is asking God for a special favor. This is certainly true prayer, and I think it would be good if more people approached God with the simple trust that children have when asking God for blessings and special favors. But this prayer of asking is not the only reason to pray.

The fourth section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is a beautiful explanation of Christian prayer and is well worth reading. I find that it is the most reader friendly of the four sections of the catechism. In the Catechism, five types of prayer are summarized: 1) Blessing and Adoration, 2) Petition, 3), Intercession, 4) Thanksgiving, and 5) Praises. To help remember the different types of prayer, re-organize them, and use the acronym P.A.R.T.

P. to Praise – bless, adore and praise

A. to Ask – petition and intercede

R. to Repent

T. to Thank

So when we pray, we should remember to make use of all four PARTs of prayer. Over the next four weeks, I will review each “PART” of prayer. But already we can see the four PARTs of prayer in the prayers of the Mass:

Praising God with the “Glory to God” and the Creed.

Asking God with the “Prayers of the Faithful.

Repenting with the Penitential Act at the beginning of Mass.

Thanking God with the Eucharistic prayer.

When prayer begins to feel a bit stale, often it is helpful to shift emphasis to a different PART of prayer. So reflect on your own prayers, and ask “When am I praising God? When am I asking God? When am I repenting? And when am I thanking God?”

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**July 3, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

We continue our series on learning to pray. A few weeks ago, I started an explanation of the prayer “Sign of the Cross,” which is the simplest prayer, and the first prayer that many of us learned as children.

This prayer has two components, the words, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” and the gesture of crossing our body from head to sternum, from heart to right side of our chest with the fingers of our right hand. Both the words and the gesture make up this prayer.

Have you ever thought about why we use gestures in our prayers? Looking at us, members of other Christian communities might ask why we need to use bodily gestures to pray, since prayer is primarily a matter of the soul. We notice in almost all religions, both Christian and non-Christian religions, that there are prayer postures and gestures. Orthodox Jews will face towards Jerusalem and beat their chests to lament the destruction of the temple. Muslims will face Mecca and bow to the ground in prayer. Yoga is actually a series of Hindu prayer postures. So, there is something about prayer that involves not only the soul, but also the body.

For Christians, we understand that we are both body and soul and because we are both body and soul, we pray with both body and soul. When we genuflect upon entering a church or kneel during Mass, we are offering God an act of worship with our body. When we move our hand across our body with our right hand, we offer a prayer with our body.

In fact, the bodily postures and gestures of prayer can sometimes lead our soul into prayer. When my mind is filled with distractions or I am feeling rushed, I find it difficult to pray. But I make the sign of the Cross, and that very gesture helps to calm my mind and heart and focus them on God. Kneeling helps us to pray. We kneel for nothing else, except for prayer. So when we kneel, often our mind and heart shift gears and are now ready to pray.

As you pray this week, reflect on how your gestures and postures help you to pray. Once you start to pay attention to the connection between the gestures of prayer and the words of prayer, many Christians find bodily gestures and postures to be an effective help to prayer.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**June 26, 2022**

Hear to Serve

## **THE FORGOTTEN ONE**

Ask any middle child in a family what it is like being the middle child, and I bet the first thing they will tell you is that they are the “Forgotten Child.” Well, if that’s the case then, when it comes to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be the middle child of Sacraments.

I have to wonder why that is? All of the Sacraments were given to us by Christ. Through His Church, we receive them, to help us on our journey to the Divine life. That sounds pretty good to me, so why do we, as a whole, ignore this one Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Part of the problem is our lack of understanding about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It isn’t about just confessing a list of our sins, our wrong doings to Jesus through our priest and taking our lumps through the penance Father gives us. Confession is an important part of the sacrament, but the focus is on restoring a relationship with our Father in Heaven. At our Baptism, we became adopted sons and daughters of God. When we sin, we turn our hearts and minds away from the Father’s love. It’s not God who left us; it’s we who have left God. When we admit this, Christ pours out the grace of His love and heals us. Our relationship to the Father is restored.

Reconciliation can be a hard thing to initiate. None of us wants to admit to someone else things we have done that we do not even want to admit to ourselves. The thought of saying our sins out loud fills us with anxiety and fear. We worry that, “Father is going to recognize my voice,” or that “Father is going to be shocked at what I have done.” We think that there is something wrong with us when we have to confess the same sins again and again. We fear that God’s forgiveness has a limit.

Jesus understands our anxieties and fears and loves us despite them. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is given to us as a gift to calm our souls and give us peace. But the devil loves our anxiety and fear. He is a master at using our fears and anxieties to keep us from receiving the graces of God through the sacrament. The devil wants to keep us from having a relationship with God.

The number one thing that keeps us from Reconciliation is pride. We think that we do not need to go to a priest to confess our sins, that we can just tell Jesus directly. All I know is that I am not in a position to tell God how He is to dispense His mercy. Jesus has given us a beautiful gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He gave the Apostles the authority to forgive or not forgive sins. This authority has been passed down through the Church. We have to have faith in Jesus and what He tells us and what He has given us. We have to put Jesus number one in our lives and not someone or something else. Because it’s when we fail to do these things, then the problems will begin for us. Judas failed to do these things and we all know how that story ended.

I could go on about the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a lifetime of columns, but my room is running out. I know how some of you feel, I’ve been there with these same thoughts and feelings. I’ve fallen into the snares of the devil. I’ve been that twenty-year-man between Reconciliations. But, I promise you this, if you truly confess with a contrite heart, the mercy of Jesus Christ will come upon you. There is no better place to be.

Let us pray that we don't make ourselves the "Forgotten Child."

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

### **June 19, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**"Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1**

We continue our series on learning to pray. Today the Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, which is also called Corpus Christi Sunday. This feast celebrates the extraordinary gift of the Lord to us that he remains present among us since he is Truly and Really Present in the Eucharist. As Catholics we do not believe that the Eucharist is a symbol. As Catholics, we take the plain meaning of Jesus' words seriously, "This is my Body," and "This is my Blood." Taking his words seriously, we believe that the Eucharist really is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is my favorite feast of the Church's year. I celebrated my first Mass as a priest on Corpus Christi Sunday.

I don't remember learning about the Eucharist when I was growing up as a Catholic. For how important the Eucharist is in the life of the Church, this should be a shocking statement. Unfortunately, my experience is not uncommon. The Second Vatican Council taught that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. This is not just a theological theory but is shown in real life experience. In the parishes and dioceses that have maintained an active devotion and placed an emphasis on the Eucharist, Catholic life is flourishing. In the parishes and dioceses that have lost their focus on the Eucharist, Catholic life has declined.

Seeing the difference, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have declared a three-year Eucharistic Revival for Catholics in the United States. This revival begins today, and our parishes will be participating.

There are many Catholics that struggle with the teaching about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. If you count yourself as one of these Catholics, I encourage you to take some time at the end of Mass and wait for the church to become quiet and still, and pray with these words from the Gospel of Mark, "I believe, help my unbelief."

After I am finished receiving Communion, the prayer I most often recite is the "Anima Christi." This beautiful prayer, which dates back centuries, is a series of petitions that the Eucharist will change me. Just as the prayer of the church changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, I pray that now that Body and Blood of Christ will change me into being a saint. I encourage you to pray this prayer after you receive Communion, and invite Jesus, now present in you by virtue of His Eucharistic Presence to change you.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**June 12, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

We continue our series on learning to pray. Today is also Trinity Sunday. The first prayer that many of us learned is a Trinitarian prayer, The Sign of the Cross.

This simple prayer consists of two parts, the first being the words, “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The second part is marking the Cross over our body, by moving our right hand from our forehead (Father), sternum (Son), and moving from the left to the right across the chest (Holy Spirit). This prayer is both the words and the gesture.

While this prayer is simple, it does not mean that it is not powerful or that it is not theologically deep.

The first words, “In the Name of...” This recalls the words that Saint Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7-8, ESV). Every time we make The Sign of the Cross, we are both declaring, and reminding ourselves that what we are about to begin, we are doing not in our own name but in the Name of God. We are doing not for ourselves, but doing it for God. So while The Sign of the Cross is simple, it is also challenging. To do anything in the Name of God, we need to ask ourselves, “Am I doing this with an attitude of reverence? Will my words and actions reflect God’s love and wisdom? Are my actions and way of life consistent or inconsistent with what God rightly expects from one of his servants?”

“...Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The words of The Sign of the Cross continue with the Trinitarian name of God. This is one of the names of God that Jesus himself shares with us, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, ESV). Reflecting on these words, the great Pope, St. John Paul II observes that God reveals himself as a family, and that the relationship among members of a family is characterized by sacrificial love that is agape, the highest form of love. And just as families expand by the exercise of love, so The Sign of the Cross reminds us that God’s goal for us is that through his love and our loving response that we are drawn into His Divine Family. This is why Jesus instructs us to call God, Our Father (see Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2), and St. Paul reminds us that we are brothers and sisters of Christ (see Romans 8:29).

This seems like a good place to pause in our reflection on The Sign of the Cross, but we will continue it in three weeks.

Blessings,

Father Bill

**June 5, 2022**

Hear to Serve

**Gifts Freely Given**

The power of the Holy Spirit is an amazing thing. Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives the dramatic account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. The Holy Spirit came in a great rushing of wind and settled above each of the Apostles in the visible form of a tongue of fire. Now, the Apostles had already received the Holy Spirit. Our Gospel reading today from St. John tells us that Jesus had breathed upon them and had given them the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit gives them the graces of peace and the power to forgive sins, but it wasn't until Pentecost that the Holy Spirit unleashed power upon the leaders of the new Church and energized their mission. He bestowed upon them great gifts, among them the courage to speak and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

We have also been given the Holy Spirit at our baptism. Baptism is a powerful spiritual gift which makes it possible to continue to receive God's grace through all of the sacraments. It is in the Sacrament of Confirmation that the Holy Spirit seals His great gifts within us. The sacrament itself is the outward sign of a very powerful and very real spiritual event. Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Piety, Good Counsel, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord are given to us. These gifts are the very same gifts given to the Apostles. The Apostles did not earn them, just as we do not earn them, because they are given freely to us by our God who longs to give us all good things. While these gifts are not earned, they must be opened and used.

Can you imagine if after Pentecost the Apostles had continued to stay in the upper room, or had decided to go back to their old lives? They had the choice to accept the gifts or not. Thankfully, the Apostles accepted the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and cooperated with them. They went out and built the Church through their powerful witness of the love of God through Jesus Christ. What about us? How many of us are cooperating with the Holy Spirit in our lives? Have we opened the gifts given to us at Confirmation and used them to grow the Church? Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, it is a good time for us to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to reenergize us with His great and powerful love. It is a good time to see what mission we are being called to.

If you have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation, now is the time to do something about that. Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. It is through Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation that we are able to become the spiritually mature Catholic Christians God wants us to be. Confirmation is not just making a public profession of our faith, it is about receiving all of the graces that God wants to give us. It is about being able to live a fully Catholic life and helping others to do the same.

It is never too late to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. If you would like to become confirmed, if you would like a sacramental marriage, or if you would like to become Catholic, call the Holy Trinity or St. Gregory parish office.

Let the Holy Spirit light our lives on fire this Pentecost. Let Him renew our hearts and through us, the world.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**May 29, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1**

How do we begin to pray? In some ways it is the easiest thing in the world. We watch children pray. They easily make the “Sign of the Cross,” fold their hands, and begin speaking to God as if they are having a regular conversation. And this is a beautiful way to pray. If we as adults can pray this way, it is a beautiful way to pray!

However, as we mature from childhood into adulthood, for many people this simple prayer begins to fade away. Something about prayer becomes a little more difficult. I have noticed this with my own prayer. As much as it is real prayer to simply lift one’s mind and heart to God and begin talking, there are doubts that creep in. There is also an expectation, “God, when will you speak?”

So I will share with you how I begin my prayers. There are many distractions and worries that can draw one’s heart and mind away from prayer. Praying requires us to shift gears from focusing our attention on the thousands of things buzzing around us to focusing on our Father in heaven who is above us. What happens when we shift gears too quickly? Is a quick, gear shift good for a transmission? It does not take much mechanical experience to know the answer. It is the same for one’s mind and heart. We cannot just turn off the worries of the world, and the distractions of our life, and expect to be able to focus on the conversation with the Lord. We need time to shift gears.

One of the Church’s great teachers on prayer, St. Ignatius of Loyola, taught about this in his manual on prayer, which is called The Spiritual Exercises. Each time he instructs the reader to meditate, he begins the prayer with this simple instruction: “Acknowledge the presence of God.”

Take a moment and do that right now. Imagine that the Lord is right next to you. What does he look like? How does his presence feel? And even before you make the “Sign of the Cross” spend a few moments simply resting in the Lord’s presence. In those few moments, let the worries of the world and the distractions of life settle down. During this little preparation, pay attention to your breathing, and intentionally take a few slow and deep breaths. Often, I will repeat a simple phrase as I am breathing to help my mind and heart shift gears. This phrase could be as simple as, “Lord, I know you are near.” It only takes a few moments, but it settles the heart, and prepares the mind for prayer.

So this week, I don’t encourage you to change anything about your prayer, except to add this simple preparation. Acknowledge the Lord’s presence. Invite him into your time for prayer. Then begin praying as you usually do. It makes a big difference in the experience of prayer.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill



**May 22, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many of us remember the great Pope, Saint John Paul II. Perhaps it's a sign that I am getting older that there are also many people that no longer remember him. He was the Pope that led the church into the third millennium. To prepare to enter into this new era he issued a document called "Novo millennio ineunte - At the beginning of the new millennium" (NMI). In that document, John Paul II expressed the desire that parishes truly become schools of contemplative prayer.

In that document, he made two observations as he reflected on the state of the world as it entered into the third millennium. The first was that there was a deep desire of many people, both Christian and non-Christian, for a sense of meaning and purpose, for a sense of God's presence, and for a deeper spirituality. The second observation was that by leading people to open their hearts to the love of God will also open their hearts to love their neighbors, and in fact allows Christians to begin to form history according to God's plan (NMI para-graph 33).

I do believe that John Paul II was correct that parishes must become schools of prayer, and I believe that this movement towards prayer is also the key to reviving parish life. I also believe that most people desire something deeper from their life of faith, and that prayer is the key to achieving that deeper and richer faith. My hope is that your hearts desire that deeper faith, and that deeper relationship with Christ. If your heart wants a deeper faith, you share the same desire that the disciples had when they approached Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1, ESV).

These bulletin columns will focus on this line from the Gospel of Luke, "Lord, teach us to pray," and will be a little catechism on prayer. I hope that it deepens your own prayer and draws you into a deeper relationship with Christ.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**May 15, 2022**

Hear to Serve

**This Is How I Will Know**

When the news was leaked that the Supreme Court had voted to overturn Roe vs Wade, I heard several Catholics say, "We finally won." I hated to have to break it to them that this is just a very small victory because the war wages on. In fact, there will be a very powerful backlash from those who support abortion. We are not policy makers, billionaires, or online influencers. What can we do?

As followers of Christ, we must always begin with the Gospel. In our reading from the Gospel of John this Sunday, Jesus says, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). The kind of love Jesus means is the kind He has for us. This is a radical love that wills the good of the other before our own. So, how does this apply to the abortion issue? The United States Council of Catholic Bishops has a plan that has four main areas where we can all help. (You can read all about it on their website: [usccb.org](http://usccb.org).)

The first thing we can do is to educate ourselves on the issue. We have to learn what the Church's teachings are and why. We must then educate our fellow Catholics because over half of the Catholics in the United States believe that legalized abortion should remain available. Whenever we share the truth with others, we must do it out of love. We should share the dignity of all human life and the love that God has for every human person at all stages of life.

The second part of the plan is to provide help for women who are experiencing problems due to their pregnancies. Too often, those who call themselves pro-choice say that those of us who are pro-life are anti-woman and that we only care about the unborn. The Church defends the dignity of women and upholds the role of motherhood. The love of Jesus demands that we help to get rid of the social, economic, physical, and emotional barriers to bringing a child into the world and that we care about the welfare of every child. We have to meet people where they are at, and many people are in very dark places. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay has several organizations and ways for each one of us to will the good of the other.

The third thing we can do is to support those people who are working to change our laws and policies. This is a long, hard fight, and even dangerous. Like Paul and Barnabas, in our second reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we must strengthen the disciples and remind them that the work of sharing the Gospel is filled with many hardships. Write letters to our pro-life lawmakers letting them know that you support their work. Also write letters to those politicians who are working to keep abortion laws in place. Tell them that you support protection of the unborn and policies that are morally acceptable alternatives to abortion.

Finally, we must pray. We pray because we have hope. John tells us in Revelation that the "old order has passed away." On His throne Jesus says, "Behold, I make all things new." It is with this confidence that we should pray, knowing that the Lord hears the cries of the poor and vulnerable and answers them.

Now is the time to take a stand. Speak up for Christ and for life in your home, at work, and everywhere you go. Now is the time to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Viva Christo Rey, Deacon Gary

**May 8, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday of the Church's year is often known as "Good Shepherd Sunday" since each year the Gospel reading is taken from John 10, the "Good Shepherd Discourse." As a result, it is often observed as a day of prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, since priests, and religious brothers and sisters, are visible manifestations of Christ in his role as the Good Shepherd. Bishop Ricken has asked all the parishes in the diocese to focus on praying for more vocations this Sunday.

Praying for more vocations is powerful. There was one little village in Italy that produced over 152 priestly vocations and 171 religious sisters. This little village in northern Italy called Lu, with only a few thousand inhabitants, is in a rural area 50 miles east of Turin. It would still be unknown to this day if, in the year 1881, the family mothers of Lu had not made a decision that had "serious consequences."

The deepest desire of many of these mothers was for one of their sons to become a priest or for a daughter to place her life completely in God's service. Under the direction of their parish priest, Msgr. Alessandro Canora, they gathered for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, asking the Lord for vocations. They received Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month with the intention that one of their children would receive a call to serve God as a priest or a religious sister. After Mass, all the mothers prayed a particular prayer together imploring for vocations to the priesthood.

Through the trusting prayer of these mothers and the openness of the other parents, an atmosphere of deep joy and Christian piety developed in the families, making it much easier for the children to recognize their vocations. Did the Lord not say, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:14)? In other words, many are called, but only a few respond to that call. No one expected that God would hear the prayers of these mothers in such an astounding way.

The prayer that the Mothers of Lu prayed was short, simple, and deep:

O God, grant that one of my sons may become a priest!  
I myself want to live as a good Christian  
and want to guide my children always to do what is right,  
so that I may receive the grace, O God,  
to be allowed to give you a holy priest or religious sister! Amen.

I believe that there are vocations to both the priesthood and to life as a religious brother or sister in our parishes. So beginning this Sunday until Corpus Christi (Sunday, June 19 this year), as a parish we will be praying the "prayer of the Mothers of Lu" after every Mass. I would also like seven volunteers to commit to coming to the church weekly (one for each day of the week) to pray for both an increase in vocations from our parishes and also that our pews will be filled. Prayer is powerful! Let us be committed to prayer for these holy goals. Lastly, I encourage every parent in our parishes to ask their sons if they would consider a call to the priesthood or as a religious brother, and to ask their daughters if they would consider a call to be a religious sister.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**May 1, 2022**

Blessed Easter Brothers and Sisters!

**“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!” Psalm 118**

I would like to draw our attention to one detail from this Sunday’s Gospel. Towards the beginning of today’s Gospel, Peter declares, “I am going fishing.”

Have you ever wondered why the disciples found it so difficult to recognize Jesus after the Resurrection? After all, they shared a life together as a community for three years before the death of the Lord on the Cross and his Resurrection on the Third Day. And at this point, this would have been at least the third time that Peter and the other disciples would have seen the Lord after his resurrection. Yet, they have eyes, but they do not see. Why is this?

I think a lot of it has to do with Peter’s simple statement, “I am going fishing.” Peter was a fisherman before he met Jesus, and now that he has followed him for three years and witnessed the Resurrection, he is simply returning to his old life. It is almost as if the time that he spent with Jesus did not change him at all. But Jesus wanted to transform his disciples by his presence, the gift of his grace, the gift of new life, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To be a follower of Jesus means that Jesus will change and transform your life. Peter had a hard time recognizing Jesus on the shore since Peter was resisting the work of grace that was supposed to transform his heart.

Many people in our own day have a very difficult time recognizing the Lord’s presence. But the Lord is present to us! After all, as he was ascending into heaven he made this solemn promise, “I will be with you always until the end of the ages.” The Lord is present to us in the most profound way in the Eucharist. But he is also present to us in and through the events of our everyday life. Do we have a sense of his close presence to us?

Many people refuse to let the Gospel change them. They are like Peter. They spend time with the Lord at times of prayer, at times to study God’s Word, and at times in Church to celebrate the sacraments. But in the end, they, like Peter “go fishing”. That is they return to their old lives. Like Peter, if we do not let the Lord change and transform us, we will not recognize the Lord’s closeness to us.

Do you want to see the Lord? I hope that answer is YES! And the Good News is that the Lord wants to see you too! Let his grace into your heart. Let it change you. And you will start to recognize the Lord and how you encounter him through the sacraments, and the events of your everyday life.

The Lord is Risen!

Fr. Bill

**April 24, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Divine Mercy Sunday is a fairly recent addition to the Church's calendar. It was added to the calendar by Pope Saint John Paul II in the year 2000. Although it is a recent addition to the calendar, it has proven to be a very popular feast, with millions of people looking forward to it and being profoundly moved by it each year.

The devotion to Divine Mercy is based upon the visions of Jesus experienced by St. Faustina Kowalska beginning in the 1930s in Poland. Jesus communicated to St. Faustina that she was to be the "secretary of his mercy." There are a number of aspects to the devotion to Divine Mercy.

First is the veneration of the image of Divine Mercy, which Jesus revealed to St. Faustina. It depicts Jesus standing in a white robe, with two rays of light, one white and the other red, emitting from his heart. Jesus encouraged that the image be carried in procession, publicly displayed, and that the Catholic Faithful hang it in their homes.

Second is the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. A chaplet is a repetitive prayer said with a set of beads to keep track of the prayers. The Rosary is the most famous chaplet, but there are other chaplets, including the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. I started reciting the chaplet on a daily basis by junior year of college. I still recite it to this day. It is through the chaplet that I started to experience, feel, and understand God's love for me. It is through the chaplet that my faith grew deeper, and I consider the chaplet to be a key part of my calling to the priesthood.

Third is observing the "Hour of Mercy." According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus died at 3:00pm on Good Friday. Since we are redeemed from our sins by the death of Jesus, 3:00pm is the "Hour of Mercy." Many people will make sure to recite the chaplet at 3:00pm (it can be recited at any point of the day of course). But it is also a time that St. Faustina encouraged all Catholics to pray and do voluntary acts of penance for the conversion of sinners.

Fourth is praying the Novena of Divine Mercy. Jesus requested that the nine days between Good Friday and Divine Mercy Sunday be offered as a novena of prayers for the world and the conversion of sinners.

The devotion to Divine Mercy is not a substitution for seeking forgiveness of sins through the sacrament of Reconciliation. Rather, the devotion to Divine Mercy is meant to move our hearts to seek God's Mercy through Confession and acts of penance. Devotion to Divine Mercy has also proven to be a strong spiritual help for Christians who are earnestly trying to eliminate vices and sins from their lives and embrace virtues and holiness.

The devotion to Divine Mercy can be summarized as (1) seeking and obtaining God's mercy through prayer, Confession, and penance, (2) trusting in Jesus' abundant mercy, and (3) showing mercy to others, especially those most in need of mercy, so that we can become conduits of God's Mercy.

I encourage all of you to foster a devotion to Divine Mercy. Its fruitfulness is firmly proven by experience.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**April 17, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is Risen! He is truly Risen! This simple phrase was actually a greeting among ancient Christians. Upon meeting, the first would say: "Christ is Risen!" and the other would respond with, "He is truly Risen!" For two Christians meeting each other, there is nothing more important than sharing the Good News of Christ's victory over sin and death.

During these celebrations of the Sacred Triduum – that is Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, the Catholic Church makes use of many rich symbols: fire, light and darkness, water, the white garments of the newly baptized, the scent of the newly consecrated Chrism, and the various colors of the vestments and other decorations.

All of these communicate to our five senses the reality of what we are celebrating: the death and Resurrection of Christ. These symbols are so varied and rich in meaning that whole books have been written to explain their meaning.

I will limit myself to one symbol: water. Before Holy Thursday Mass, all the Holy Water in the parishes was removed and poured out in the cemetery. At the midway point of the Easter Vigil, the new water is blessed. We know that water is essential for life. One time when I was staying in the desert in southern California, there was a rare rain storm. Usually in that desert it only rains two or three times a year. Over the next day the once barren desert yielded an abundance of new plant life and flowers. It was one of the most beautiful things that I have ever seen. Just as quickly, as the water dried up, the plants returned to dormancy.

The desert appeared dead, but water brought it to new life. The blessing of the Easter water reminds us that what seems to be spiritually dead can be brought to new life. Part of the joy of Easter is this new life. And we should be rejoicing in the new life.

During the past two years, many of us have experienced a desert. Many of the things that we used to take for granted, both in the church and outside the church, dried up for us. This is a type of emotional death. Many of us also had to look inwardly, struggle with an inner spiritual desert, and start asking the questions about what truly mattered, and what truly had meaning. As life returns to normal, it is also time to sprinkle the water of grace upon these desert experiences and these moments of emotional and spiritual death. Take the time to ask yourself, "Where is Christ calling me to new life in my moment of struggle? Where does Christ want to pour the water of his grace upon my spiritual emptiness?"

Wherever we invite Christ to come and sprinkle the water of his grace, there will be new life. My prayer for you and my invitation for you is that this Easter is not just an event that we remember, but even more, a reality that we experience. This Easter Christ comes with the water of his grace. Bring him your desert, and together with him, rejoice in the new life that he wishes to bring you.

Happy and Blessed Easter,

Fr. Bill

**April 10, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the celebration of the Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, we enter into the most sacred time of the Catholic liturgical calendar: Holy Week. Through sacred symbols and actions, we liturgically participate in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord. That is the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The word paschal originally relates to the Jewish Passover or more specifically to the lamb that was sacrificed for the Passover. For Christians, since Jesus is the true Lamb of God, Paschal refers to Jesus himself, since he was sacrificed for our sins.

The word mystery is not used in the same way as it is used for an Agatha Christie novel or the TV show Unsolved Mysteries. It is not about what we do not know, rather for a Christian the word mystery refers to those things that exceed our ability and understanding. The mystery for a Christian is that during Holy Week we do not merely remember what Jesus did nearly two thousand years ago. We do much more than remember. The symbols and actions that we use during the liturgy makes us present to the Lord. Liturgical mystery makes the death of the Lord and the resurrection of the Lord present to us here and now.

We don't just remember the death and resurrection of the Lord, we participate in it!

One of my favorite practices of Holy Week highlights our participation. Have you ever noticed that during Holy Week you do something during Mass that you never do during any other time of the year? Normally at Mass the deacon (or priest) are the only ones that proclaim the Gospel, but on Palm Sunday and Good Friday the whole congregation proclaims the Gospel.

This highlights that the Lord did not offer him-self only for the people of his time, but we also take part in his sacrifice. When we together proclaim that Peter denied Jesus, we come to realize that we too often deny Jesus in our thoughts, words and actions. Together we say, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." When do we make the same choice in our life today? It's no secret that the Gospel makes demands on us that often are unpopular in today's culture. Do we choose the Gospel or do we choose what is popular? Do we choose the Gospel or do we choose what is politically correct? Every time we do not choose the Gospel, we cast our vote for Barabbas.

Take time to reflect on the Passion narratives this week. Take them paragraph by paragraph. Ask yourself: when have I voted with the crowd against Jesus? When have I chosen Caesar over the King of heaven and earth?

But as you reflect, never forget the reason why the Lord offered himself as a sacrifice. Reflect not just on our own words, but also on his words. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Or the words that he speaks to the dying thief, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

And lastly, let us imitate the Lord as he entrusted himself to the loving hands of his Father, and together with the Lord, we say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Blessings on the Holy Week,

Father Bill

**April 3, 2022**

Hear to Serve

### **BOLD STATEMENTS**

In our second reading today, St. Paul makes a pretty bold statement in his Letter to the Philippians. “For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him” (Phil 3:8).

Can you and I also make that claim? In today’s world we place our values and our worth on material and monetary possessions and absolute truth has become covered up by relativism. How many of us would accept the loss of everything we own? How many of us are willing to let go of our comfortable religious practices and really live them? How many of us would be willing to suffer if only we could come to know Christ better and have our lives become more grounded in Him?

Since St Paul (Saul) had his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, everything else in his life became rubbish, unimportant. His eyes, his mind, and his heart were opened up to a much greater life, a life in the Risen Christ. Paul left behind his old understanding of faith where following laws and rules was the most important thing. He realized that Christ’s resurrection will elevate us to a life so much better than we can ever imagine.

As a kid I was pretty fascinated with National Geographic Magazine. Some of my favorite pictures were of the tropical fish. I could look at them for hours. But it wasn’t until I got in the water on a snorkeling trip that I realized the injustice that pictures do to these creatures. Their color, movement, and beauty was so much more intense in the living experience of being with them.

That must have been in a small way what it was like for Paul to interact with the risen Christ. That is what he is trying to tell not only the Philippians but us today. We have to have a living relationship with Jesus. We have to look at every aspect of our faith and connect it to the living Christ. It is not about following the Commandments and all of the rules, but living them out in love of God and each other.

This is not easy. The Catholic writer, Flannery O’Connor wrote, “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.” If we had perfect maturity, we would be able to see past the cost to the glory of the prize. Even St. Paul admits he hasn’t attained that perfect maturity, he hasn’t mastered it all since being taken possession of by Jesus the Christ. This is a life-long relationship that grows, changes, challenges, and matures.

We should remember that we too have been taken possession of by Jesus the Christ in our baptism. It is up to us to continue toward the goal of the next life, a better life, a life that will offer us things we can’t even imagine. St. Paul tells us to forget what lies behind us. He urges us to let go of material and monetary possessions and to forget about our self-fulfillment in relativism. None of these things are life-giving experiences. He tells us to focus on what lies ahead and aim for the prize of everlasting life through Jesus the Christ. Let us make a bold statement today.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary



**March 27, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading is a celebration. After forty years of wandering in the desert, the people of Israel finally enter into the promised land. They have reached their goal!

The early Christians read this passage symbolically. The wandering in the desert represents our life here on earth, and the manna represents the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) that support us on our way. The promised land represents heaven. Notice how the manna stops once the people enter the promised land. They no longer need God to send them bread since they now eat the produce of the land. There are no sacraments in heaven. This is because in heaven we will be directly joining in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

The manna was holy since it was a gift from God. The manna was good since it provided strength for the people to continue their journey through the desert. But God had something better planned for them. It is the same for the sacraments. They are holy since they are instituted by Christ. They are good since through them we already receive the grace and blessings from God that strengthen us on our journey through life.

During their wanderings in the desert, the Hebrew people had often forgotten that the Lord was leading them to the promised land. They were so focused on today that they forgot about tomorrow. Forgetting the great gift that God had promised them, they could not understand the hardships and difficulties of the desert. They even grumbled that they wanted to return to Egypt, to the very place where they were slaves. Nonetheless, the promise of greater things yet to come reminded them to keep on moving forward.

As we face our own difficulties and uncertainties during our "wandering in the desert," we too can have a difficult time understanding what God is doing. Notice how the Hebrews forgot the hardships of the desert once they entered the land that God promised them. It is the same for us. As we lift our eyes to God and his promises, the difficulties of the present moment seem small compared to the glory that God has prepared for us. And during this time here, God continues to nourish us through the sacraments. May we have the strength to continue to look towards the Lord and his promises, that we too may share in the celebration of entering our own promised land.

A blessed and holy Lent to you,

Father Bill

**March 20, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading should be familiar to most of us since it is the story of Moses and the burning bush. This story is an important stage in the history of salvation and supremely important for both Jewish and Christian theology, but it also provides a practical lesson on developing our spiritual life.

"And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned'" (Exodus 3:2-3, ESV). In the dry desert climate, a burning bush was such a common sight that it would not have warranted much attention. But Moses was aware that God was using what appeared to be an ordinary event to reveal himself in an extraordinary way. Are we paying attention? St. Josemaria Escriva remarks that God often reveals himself through the ordinary events of our daily life, but we do not take the time to reflect and notice.

Moses was curious to see more and he laid aside what he was doing to investigate. Curiosity is an important, yet underrated, aspect of faith. Anyone who thinks the Catholic faith isn't interesting is simply not paying attention. What sparks your interest about Catholicism and draws you in deeper? This is a place to be curious and is often the place that God draws us deeper into himself.

As Moses approached this great sight, God responded, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5, ESV). Why did God ask Moses to remove his sandals? It was an act of reverence. Faith requires reverence. Reverence is the respect that we show towards God and towards holy things. Are we reverent in church and in our prayer? There is a casualness about church that is too common. While God is approachable, he also deserves our respect. A lack of reverence harms faith in three ways: 1) it is disrespectful of God the Almighty, 2) it communicates to ourselves and others that these are not important, and 3) it diminishes the mystery of our faith. Cultivating an attitude of reverence is a practical way of deepening one's faith.

There is another effect to removing the sandals: on the rough, rocky desert soil, Moses would not have been able to run away from God! By telling him to remove his sandals, God was forcing Moses to stay and listen. Bishop Ricken often encourages this prayer, "Lord, help me to do your will, not a moment too soon, and not at a moment too late, but at the moment you call me to do it." Faith requires waiting on the Lord because it's the Lord's time not our time. Prayers often seem dry or fruitless, but we rush through them. Try slowing down, and give the prayer time "to soak in," and don't be so quick to run away. God often speaks at the last moment of prayer, not at the first.

God would have also expected Moses that would try to run away since he was going to send Moses back to Egypt. This is not something that Moses wanted to do, after all, Pharaoh was seeking to kill him. Just like Moses, God has a plan for us, and more often than not at first it is something we would run away from. When God is calling, do not run away! Remember the words of the Our Father, "thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." God's plan will disrupt our lives, but God knows us better than we know ourselves, and his plan for us is greater than what we could plan for ourselves.

Praying that you will have a happy and blessed Lent,

Father Bill

**March 13, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Have you ever climbed a mount? When I was stationed in San Diego, I lived close to Cowles Mountain. At only 1,593 feet, it was not a very tall mountain, but it was the highest point in the city of San Diego. And even though it was only 1,593, physical effort was still required to reach the peak.

Most Saturday mornings, I climbed Cowles Mountain since the view from the top was worth it. The view was so good that I would forget about the effort required to climb that mountain.

In today's Gospel, Jesus takes his three closest disciples up to a mountain top. However, he was not taking them to show them the view, but rather to show them his glory. What the gospel account leaves out is the effort that Peter, James, and John had to exercise as they followed Jesus up those mountain trails.

The church always reads an account of Jesus' Transfiguration on the Second Sunday of Lent. This is reminding us that on our journey as disciples of the Lord, we too are climbing a mountain. This is not a physical mount of course, but rather the Lord is showing us our future. We read in the first letter of St. John, "When he appears, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). This is our goal: to be like Jesus!

But how do we climb this mountain? These trails are not marked by sign posts, but rather, the Word of God and the examples of the saints show us the way. And just like climbing a physical mountain, it will require effort. During the season of Lent, this trail to climb the Lord's mountain is marked by three signs: 1) prayer, 2) fasting, and 3) almsgiving.

If we have taken Lent seriously so far, these three practices are not strangers to our daily life. If we have taken Lent seriously so far, we have experienced the sacrifice that these three practices require. Like climbing a mountain, Lent should be hard. But this Sunday, we look towards the mountain top, and we see our destiny. Let this be an encouragement for us in our Lenten sacrifices. That every moment of time sacrificed for prayer, every act of self-denial that allows us to fast and give alms, every effort of Lent is one more foot that we have climbed on the mountain of holiness.

I encourage you to reflect on this passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NAB).

As disciples, we are seeking something much more than a mountain view, or a gold medal. As disciples we are seeking eternal life. If the mountain view is worth the climb, and if the gold medal is worth the discipline of athletic training, how much more effort should we be willing to put into our eternal life?

Blessed and holy Lent,

Father Bill

**March 6, 2022**

My brothers and sisters,

Lent is once again upon us. It is a time when we are asked to increase our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time when we as Catholics are asked to really put the emphasis on others and not ourselves. It is time for your deacon to make his annual plug for the CRS Rice Bowl.

The thing I love about Catholic Relief Services and their Rice bowls is that nothing is wasted. When you give to Catholic Relief Service, 92% of your donation goes to the actual program. The remaining 8% is used for administrative costs, advertising, and other general expenses. PLUS and this is a big PLUS, whatever you give to the CRS Rice Bowl, 25% of your donation stays right here in our Diocese of Green Bay to help the hungry in our area. You can't do better than that, can you?

The Rice Bowl donations help CRS to target hunger faced by people around the globe. They buy seeds for farmers, goats so families can have milk, and CRS has programs so people can have fresh water. They also teach people to run small businesses so they can be self-sustaining.

Last year I brought up the 1% guide. I believe this worked out well because our donations were up for the Rice Bowls. Remember I asked that you total up your monthly expenses, mortgage, rent, car payments, utilities, food, etc. Whatever that comes to, you give 1% of your expenses to the Rice Bowl. A one-time deal. So, if your monthly expenses total \$2000, you make a one-time donation of \$20.

Well, this year I'm going to ask for a little more. If you can find it possible to give one and a half percent to the CRS Rice Bowl, it would really make a great difference. As costs have risen for us, you can rest assured costs have also risen for those doing charitable work. Inflation is at 6 or 7% in our country, we know groceries are more expensive. If you tried to build or remodel, you know the cost of building materials is through the roof.

There are several ways we can get the extra half a percent. We can put a Rice Bowl in our car and deposit our change every time we go through a drive thru or come out of a store. As we fast and give up chocolate, dessert, and beer for Lent, we can put the money we would have spent on those items into the Rice Bowl.

Catholic Relief Services is gearing up for the war in the Ukraine where they are already providing food, shelter, hygiene supplies, and counseling for the women and children fleeing into Poland and other countries.

So, as you give for the Rice Bowl make sure you mark your check or your envelope CRS Rice Bowl so the Holy Ladies in our parish offices get your donation to the right place.

This Lent let us Pray, let us Fast, and let us give Alms for those in the world who are less fortunate. May our Lenten observances align us with the will of Christ.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**February 27, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In just a few days, Lent begins with the celebration of Ash Wednesday. The first Sunday of Lent follows, and the church always reads one of the Gospel accounts of the temptation of Christ in the desert. Christ spent forty days in the desert, and Lent is also forty days. This is not a coincidence. The Church is asking us to imitate Christ.

Lent begins with ashes to remind us about the passing nature of this world. In days of old, before a Pope or king was crowned, a velvet rope was burnt before him by a friar, while the friar announced, “Sic transit gloria mundi,” which is Latin for “thus passes the glory of the world.” The ashes on our foreheads should remind us of the passing glory of the world and help us to shift our perspective to focus on those things that do not pass away. This Wednesday, take time to reflect on what’s important to God. St. Paul gives us a clue on what is truly important, “So faith, hope, love remain, and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NAB).

On Ash Wednesday we are also required to fast. This means that Catholics, between the ages of 18 and 59, are required to restrict their intake of food to one regular size meal, and may take two additional small meals to maintain strength. This fast is also required on Good Friday. In addition, all Catholics age 14 and older are required to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. These are minimum requirements for fasting, but Pope Paul VI (Pope from 1963 to 1978) encouraged all Catholics to voluntarily embrace more fasting especially during Lent. With fasting we imitate Christ, who hungered in the desert.

Why fast? Generations for Catholics (and not just Catholics, but most major world religions) experienced fasting as a powerful spiritual tool. Fasting is an act of reparation, by voluntarily enduring the hardship of hunger, we can make amends for our own sins and the sins of others. Fasting is an act of asceticism or spiritual training, by voluntarily choosing to restrict our food, we can train our appetites and grow in moral and spiritual freedom. Fasting is a powerful tool to combat temptations. Fasting is an act of solidarity with the poor. Many people throughout the world are malnourished. By going hungry, we can share in their cross and the money we would have spent on food can be given to charity.

Lastly, fasting awakens a spiritual hunger. As Catholics, we understand that there is a deep connection between the soul and the body. By choosing to endure hunger voluntarily, often we notice that a deeper spiritual hunger for God awakens within our souls. The experience of the saints and other spiritual masters has shown that the combination for prayer and fasting is the quickest way to inflame an otherwise lukewarm faith.

For our spiritual ancestors, the forty days leading up to Easter were known simply as “the Fast.” They knew the power of this spiritual practice. I ask for you to prayerfully consider your fasting this Lent, that you too can experience that power in our life of faith.

Many Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**February 20, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's second reading, the Apostle Paul compares the life of the first man, who is earthly, and the second man, who is spiritual.

As Christians, we believe that we have a body and a soul. Both a body and a soul require care. Since we can see a body, it's easy to notice the needs of the body: good nutrition, proper clothing and housing, and medical attention when necessary. These are the needs of the earthly man that the Apostle Paul writes about.

The spiritual man is the life of Christ in our soul. As Christians, we believe that Christ dwells in our souls from the moment we are baptized. Paul writes about this to the Colossians, "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Since Christ's life in our soul is mysterious and unseen, it is all too easy to forget about the needs of our Christ life. Our souls need just as much (if not more) care and attention as our bodies.

Lent is approaching in just a few weeks. On Ash Wednesday, when we come forward to receive our Ashes, we will hear these words, "Remember that you are but dust, and to dust you shall return." Lent is a time to re-examine our spiritual priorities. While no one should neglect the needs of the body, after all the body was crafted by God from the mud of the earth, the body will pass away. The treasures we invest in our body will only last as long as our time here on earth. As Psalm 90 tells us, "You sweep man away as with a flood; he is like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers" (Psalm 90:5-6). The body is important, but it is not eternally important.

Rather during Lent, we are called to give priority to the care of our souls. We return to the words that the Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians, "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Colossians 3:1). Our soul is already our participation in eternal life, and we should give it the attention and care that it needs. The soul is eternally important.

During Lent the Church proposes three powerful tools to renew the life of Christ within our souls: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. In prayer, we renew that conversation with God that nourishes our souls and builds up our faith. In fasting, we voluntarily go hungry. Fasting not only is an effective tool at combating temptation, but it expresses a trust and hope in the Lord, "who sends the rich away hungry, but fills the hungry with good things" (Mary's song from Luke 1:53). In almsgiving, we show our love for our neighbor, which fulfills the second half of the greatest commandment, "to love your neighbor, as yourself" (see Matthew 22:39). Almsgiving also helps us to realize the proper place of our worldly good in light of the perspective of eternity.

With the days we have left before Lent begins, please take time to consider seriously, prayerfully, and intentionally, how you will be caring for your soul during Lent.

I leave you with the words of the Gospel of Matthew, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 9:20).

Many Blessings, Fr. Bill

**February 13, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Luke addresses the financial and social conditions of the human race: the rich, the poor, the hungry, the satisfied, those grieving, those laughing, the outcast, and those socially acceptable. Some people become so consumed by their troubles, they are unable to recognize God's tremendous love for them. With our Hearts Filled with Hope, we are called to help those struggling most in life.

Through your support of the Bishop's Appeal, Catholic Charities counselors are able to help people resolve their problems. Whether helping a grieving widow, a teenager with a drug addiction, or a family in extreme debt, counselors are there bringing hope.

As a chaplain in the navy, I have personally benefited from the counseling services offered for free to service members. However, these services are not available to the general public. I am grateful to learn that men and women from our diocese have free counseling services available through Catholic Charities, so that everyone who is struggling with challenging life issues may receive competent and caring help. You help to support these services through your support of the Bishop's Appeal.

Join me in helping lift up those who are struggling most in life. Please prayerfully consider making a gift to the 2022 Bishop's Appeal. Visit the Bishop's Appeal website at [www.catholicfoundationgb.org/give](http://www.catholicfoundationgb.org/give) to make your gift today! Thank you for your support of the 2022 Bishop's Appeal.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**February 6, 2022**

Hear to Serve...

### **FISHING IS HARD WORK**

More than a few years ago, a good friend and I decided to go smelt fishing. We took our nets to all of the piers in the area and, like the Apostles in today's Gospel reading, we didn't have anything to show for our efforts. When we stopped for gas, an old guy at the next pump began talking to us. He told us to go out to the nuclear plant because the smelt like the warm water discharge.

Off we went armed with our dip nets and several five gallon buckets. Well, let me tell you the old man was right because before long we had a bucket full of smelt. We were astonished and delighted when we realized we had soon filled five buckets.

Well, let me tell you what seemed like a great idea wasn't so much a great idea after cleaning the first bucketful of those tiny fish. At 4:30 in the morning, we were sorry we had ever met that old man.

As I read the Gospel today, I couldn't help but think about Peter when he cries out, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Yes, we all could be a bit more humble and admit to the Lord we are sinful people. But I wonder if there was something else that was bothering Peter? Did Peter realize before anyone else that when Jesus comes into your boat, comes into your life, that there is going to be work to do? And sometimes what seems to be impossible work?

Our call to serve Christ can come in so many different forms. Sometimes we are called to dip the nets of our time and talents. Our parishes are in need of volunteers to work at and run our Fish Fry and Fall Festival. We need people to be on our councils. We are in great need of readers and altar servers. We need parents who are willing to volunteer and to teach their children the value of service. We are also called to spend time learning more about our faith and sharing it with others.

We are also called to lower the nets of our treasure. We are asked to give to the Bishop's Appeal. When each of us sacrifices what we can, we are assured of a great catch. Let's work together to meet our goals in record time.

Fishing for the Lord is hard work, harder than cleaning buckets of smelt. While my friend and I were eventually rewarded when we feasted on our catch, Jesus will reward our labor and sacrifices at His great feast in Heaven.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary



**January 30, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you! Today's second reading is familiar to anyone who has recently attended a wedding. It's Paul's "discourse on love." The poetic reflection on love makes it an obvious choice for bridal couples. Paul did not, however, originally intend to reflect on romantic love. He intended to reflect on the love that should prevail among his disciples and among ourselves as Christians.

Paul's idea of Christian love is beautiful, but not widely practiced in our culture. "Love is patient..." Are we patient? "Love is not quick-tempered..." Are we quick-tempered? "It does not brood over injury..." Do we brood? Our current times thrive off of being offended, and on being quick tempered, and self-seeking. As Christians, we are not called to conform ourselves to the world, but rather to be transformed by the Spirit of Christ (see Romans 12:2). If we take seriously Paul's call to love patiently, kindly, and selflessly, we can transform not only our own hearts, but the world around us.

Paul is not just writing from theory but from his own experience. Remember that he was not always an Apostle. He started as a persecutor of Christians. He was responsible for imprisoning Christians and even handing them over to be executed. Then he was converted by Christ on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-22, the Feast of the Conversion of Paul was just celebrated this past week, January 25). Paul was blinded by the Light of Christ and had to be led by the hand to the Church in Damascus.

What do you think Paul expected when he was brought into the Church? These were the family members and friends of the same people that just days before Paul had handed over to be killed. These people knew that Paul was coming to Damascus with the intention of putting them in chains to bring them back to face trial in Jerusalem. And now, Paul was asking to be baptized, and accepted by them.

If anyone had the right to be quick-tempered and to brood over their injuries, these people had that right. If these people reflected our current culture, Paul would have expected recrimination and even vengeance.

But what did Paul experience?

Paul was received with patience and kindness. The Christians were not self-inflated nor rude. Instead of being quick-tempered, they were quick to forgive. Instead of brooding over injury, they rejoiced that God's grace was powerful enough to convert someone like Paul.

Paul writes beautifully about love because he received this love from other Christians. It healed him. To love like Paul calls us to love is challenging. It's more than challenging, it's sacrificial. But it's powerful. It's powerful enough to convert Paul, and powerful enough to convert our neighbors. It is the love that we are called to share with others.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**January 23, 2022**

How much time do you spend with the Word of God that comes to us through Sacred Scripture? The letter to the Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is living and effective (4:12). The Word of God has power. I encourage every member of the parish to spend at least ten to fifteen minutes a day meditating on Sacred Scripture. Invite the power of God's Word into your hearts, lives, and homes. Yes, at times it can be difficult to understand, but the power of God's Word does not come from our understanding, rather the power comes from the Holy Spirit. Some suggestions for incorporating in your prayer would be participating in a Bible study. One is offered every Tuesday at 9:00 am at Holy Trinity, and we will be looking at starting one at St. Gregory's in the near future. There are also a number of free Bible studies offered online, check out <https://stpaulcenter.com/>, <https://amenapp.org/>, or listening to one of many popular "Bible in Year" podcasts (<https://ascensionpress.com/pages/biy-registration>).

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

**January 16, 2022**

Hear to Serve

“WOMAN”

In John’s Gospel today we hear Mary make a request of her Son when the wine ran out at the wedding they were attending in Cana. We hear Jesus respond to his mother in what we would consider a disrespectful tone. Jesus addresses His mother in this way, “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?” The only other time we hear of addressing His Mother as “Woman” is also in John’s Gospel when He is on the cross. Jesus says to her, “Woman, behold your son.” (Jn 19:26). Why is this? Doesn’t Jesus have respect for His mother?

St. Augustine answers the question as he tells us that Jesus was not trying to disrespect His mother, the person who He received flesh from. No, Jesus wanted to prioritize His divinity instead. As Jesus was about to do His first miracle and change water into wine, He wanted His divinity to stand out and the divinity that made the woman, rather than the humanity that was made in her. In other words, Jesus is responding to the situation not as Mary’s son but as Mary’s God.

This is exactly as it should be, for Mary also wants our focus to be on our Lord, Jesus. When Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb, her soul cried out, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” So, at the wedding in Cana, even though Jesus seemed to ignore her plea, Mary still put the focus on Jesus and his divinity. She told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” Mary always leads us to the Divine. Mary always leads us to her Son because Mary knows her Son is extraordinary.

Just as Adam and Eve led all of humanity away from God, away from the extraordinary life of the Divine through their fall into original sin, Mary wants to lead us back to her son. Mary encourages us to be drawn back to the Divine.

As we start back in Ordinary Time this week, let us not be fooled into thinking our lives should be ordinary. By our Baptism we become sons and daughters of God, and we are called to be something much more than ordinary.

Jesus took ordinary water, and he changed it into something even better--wine. Then, He did something extraordinary and made wine into His blood so we could become extraordinary. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we share in the Divine life.

So, let us listen to Mary. Let Mary lead us to her Son, our God and Savior, Jesus the Christ. And let us, “Do whatever He tells us to do.”

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

**January 9, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast concludes the Christmas season, and tomorrow we begin Ordinary Time.

What does it mean to be baptized? Most of us were baptized when we were too young to remember, and as a result it is easy to take this sacrament for granted. St. Louis the King understood the importance of baptism, as he reflects, "I think more of the place where I was baptized than of Rheims Cathedral where I was crowned. It is a greater thing to be a child of God than to be the ruler of a Kingdom. The crown I shall lose at death but baptism will be my passport to an everlasting glory."

We celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family, which reminds us that Jesus entered a human family. Jesus makes a great exchange by becoming Incarnate: he enters a human family here on earth so that we might become members of God's family in heaven. He was the only child of Mary, but he wanted to make her a spiritual mother of many children. As Saint Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). Baptism makes us a child of God, and hence a brother or sister of Christ.

There is nothing small about being a son or daughter of God, but it is something that we often forget. Today's feast should remind us to celebrate our own baptism and to rejoice in being called a child of God. Take the time to pull out the family Bible and mark the anniversary of your baptism on the calendar. Celebrate that day as a second birthday. Pray for the priest (or deacon) who baptized you. And renew your baptismal promises.

May this feast be a source of joy for you this week, and may its celebration spurn you on to continue to grow in holiness and grace.

Many Blessings

Fr. Bill

**January 2, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you and Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord (which is traditionally celebrated on January 6). Since there are twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany, this is where we get the traditional twelve days of Christmas. The American Bishops transfer Epiphany to a close by Sunday for the convenience of the faithful. So if you had your heart set on a gift of “eleven pipers piping,” you will have to wait for another year.

There are three traditional aspects of Epiphany: (1) the visit of the Magi bearing gifts, (2) the Baptism of the Lord, and (3) changing water into wine at Cana. The Catholic liturgy spreads out these three celebrations over three Sundays, celebrating Epiphany today, the Baptism next Sunday, and the wedding feast at Cana is read the following Sunday.

In many cultures, gift giving happens on Epiphany instead of Christmas. This remembers the gifts that the Magi brought to the baby Jesus. Were these the gifts that Jesus wanted? Gold, frankincense and myrrh are not as practical as diapers, wipes, and onesies, but they are important symbols. With gold, the Magi were proclaiming that Jesus was their king. With frankincense, the Magi were confessing that Jesus was Lord and God. And with myrrh, a burial spice, they were recognizing that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. So while these gifts were not the most practical gifts for a mother and her infant, they were perfectly appropriate for Mary the Mother of God and Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

What gifts can we offer to Jesus? He no longer needs gold, frankincense and myrrh. At every Mass, we are asked to offer our gifts, when we hear the priest say: “Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God our Almighty Father...” St. Paul helps us to answer this question in the letter to the Romans: “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...” (Romans 12:1).

At every Mass, Jesus wants three gifts from us: (1) He wants the lives of Christians be devoted to him. Every Christian has a mission from God, and the more we seek to do his will the more we give our life to him. (2) He wants hearts eager to grow in holiness. By growing in holiness, we come to resemble him, and share in his glory. (3) And, he wants our love and gratitude. Recall the words of the prayer of St. Francis, “It is in giving that I receive and in dying that I am born to eternal life.” Jesus does not want these gifts for the sake of his own ego, but rather the more that we give ourselves to him, the more that we receive his life, and his life is our joy!

Let us imitate the Magi today, by giving Christ the gifts he truly desires!

Merry Christmas,

Fr. Bill