God’s mercy knows ‘no limits,’ frees people from despair, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—God’s ability to forgive “knows no limits” as his mercy frees people from bitterness and despair, Pope Francis said.

“The Church’s forgiveness must be every bit as broad as that offered by Jesus on the cross and by Mary at his feet. There is no other way,” he said after opening the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Mary Major on Jan. 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

On the first day of the new year, Pope Francis opened the last holy door in Rome as part of the extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy.

“The door we have opened is, in fact, a Door of Mercy,” he said in his homily, referring to the Roman basilica’s large bronze doors depicting Mary presenting her resurrected son, Jesus.

“Those who cross its threshold are called to enter into the merciful love of the father with complete trust and freedom from fear; they can leave this basilica knowing with certainty that Mary is ever at their side, especially during times of trouble and sorrow, he said.

At the church dedicated to Mary and on her feast day as Mother of God, the pope explained how Mary is the mother of mercy because she bore “the very face of divine mercy,” the Son of God “made incarnate for our salvation.”

“Mary is an icon of how the Church must offer forgiveness to those who seek it. The mother of forgiveness teaches the Church that the forgiveness granted on Golgotha knows no limits. Neither the law with its quibbles, nor the wisdom of this world with its distinctions, can hold it back,” he said.

Mary offers the world Jesus, who in turn, offers that forgiveness which “renews life, enables us once more to do God’s will and fills us with true happiness,” the pope said. See MERCY, page 2

March for Life changes venues, but strengthens message of ending abortion

WASHINGTON (CNS)—The annual March for Life, set for Jan. 22, will convene in a new location in the nation’s capital for the traditional midday rally.

Because of the ongoing refurbishment of the National Mall and strict new regulations that require temporary flooring to protect the grass, the rally has been moved from the West Front of the Capitol to the Washington Monument grounds.

“We were lucky to get that. It’s going to cost us $70,000,” Jeanne Monahan-Mancini, director of the March for Life, addresses crowds of supporters during the March for Life rally on the National Mall in Washington on Jan. 22, 2015. This year’s rally has been moved from the West Front of the Capitol to the Washington Monument grounds. (CNS photo/Leslie E. Kossoff)
Away in a manger: Pope makes secret stop at Nativity scene’s birthplace

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis made a surprise visit to the place where his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, created the world’s first Nativity scene.

He wanted to visit the sanctuary and places where St. Francis, on Christmas Eve in 1223, represented the first living Nativity in history,” Bishop Domenico Pompili of Assisi told the Italian bishops’ conference. “He wanted to show me because that star will lead me to God, to tears. “Francesco,” some participants were moved to tears.

The pope asked them to think about whether their own lives were “meek, humble, [ones] that don’t turn its nose, that isn’t full of pride.”

The Three Wise Men were very smart “because they let themselves be led by the star. All the splendor of Herod’s huge palace” did not fool them because they were able to sense right away that the promised king they were looking for was not there, the pope said.

He told the young people their lives would always be guided by these two signs—two gifts from God. He asked them to reflect on two important signs associated with Christ’s birth, the star of Bethlehem and the baby in a manger. “The sky is full of stars, isn’t it? But there is one that is special,” the star that inspired the Three Wise Men to leave everything behind and begin a journey into the unknown, he said.

The pope asked the young people to be on the lookout in their own lives for a special star that calls us to do something greater, to strike out on a journey, to make a decision. “We have to ask for this grace of discovering ‘the star’ that God today wants to show me because that star will lead me to Jesus,” he said.

The second sign, which the angels tell the shepherds about, is a baby born in a manger, he said.

This shows, the pope said, “how God lowered himself, obliterated himself to be like us, to walk before us, but with smallness, that is, you can say, humility, which goes against pride, self-importance, arrogance.”

The pope asked them to think about whether their own lives were “meek, humble, [ones] that don’t turn its nose, that isn’t full of pride.”

“I was not even told,” the pope said. The pope had nothing listed on his official schedule, and so he used the free day to visit the Franciscan shrine in Greccio, a town miles northeast of Rome and 56 miles south of Assisi.

The pope said he and the shrine’s prior were the only people informed a few days ahead of time of the pope’s plans to make the Jan. 4 visit.

An atmosphere arose in a blue Ford Focus accompanied by two plainclothes security guards, the shrine’s guarin said he was caught completely off guard. “I didn’t even have my habit on, and I quickly went to the rectory to put it on. Then I opened the gate for the pope,” Francisca Father Alfredo Silvestri told the Italian bishops’ TV2000.

The pope also made an unannounced stop at a local youth meeting organized by the diocese. Amid loud cheers and chants of “Francesco,” some participants were moved to tears.

The pope told the some 150 young people that their bishop had told him it would be a good idea to pray at Greccio during the Christmas season. “So I came to pray. But I won’t say what white lie he used to lure me here,” the pope joked.

In impromptu remarks, the pope told them to reflect on two important signs associated with Christ’s birth, the star of Bethlehem and the baby in a manger. “The sky is full of stars, isn’t it? But there is one that is special,” the star that inspired the Three Wise Men to leave everything behind and begin a journey into the unknown, he said.

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and it's not something we budgeted for," said Jeanne Monahan-Mancini, president of March for Life. "It's the most economical wide-open space we could afford."

Other than the venue, the event, which draws thousands of Catholic parishioners, parochial school students and other pro-life supporters from across the country, is expected to remain much the same.

"Pro-Life is Pro-Woman" is this year's theme. "We know that abortion takes the life of one and wounds the life of another, so we always try to emphasize ... that there's always hope and healing for anyone who's made that sad decision, and it's very important in terms of our messaging," Monahan-Mancini told Catholic News Service. (CNS)

It's also intended as a way to blunt critics, "because of the [presidential] election and a lot of the rhetoric about the false 'war on women.'

Retired Baltimore Ravens football player Matt Birk is the headline speaker at the rally and that evening's Rose Dinner. Monahan-Mancini said she expected at least a couple of Republican presidential candidates to speak at the rally as well, but that any announcement would come just before the event.

"The truth is going to come out one way or the other. The safest way to proceed for the vast majority of those involved in the march is through the peaceful, prayerful activities and legitimate avenues of government." —Father Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life

"I don't think that poll is fair," Monahan-Mancini said. "And I don't think it's reflective of the average American and what they think.

Reversing the landmark Supreme Court decision remains the long-term goal of the march. But organizers told CNS they prefer to focus on changing the nationwide conversation.

"In the future, we have a much loftier goal, and that's to change the hearts and minds of Americans. That no woman, in her right mind, would ever choose abortion. Because we really have a deprived culture when any woman thinks that's an empowering act," Monahan-Mancini said.

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The poll found that 58 percent of the respondents thought abortion should be legal in most or all cases. That's an increase from 51 percent who said so at the beginning of 2015. The poll showed equal support among both Democrats and Republicans.

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Welcome the stranger

The U.S. bishops have designated this week, Jan. 3-9, as National Migration Week with the theme, “A Stranger and You Welcomed Me.” The theme comes directly from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 25:35-40), in which Christ said that those who welcome a stranger welcome him. This year’s observance comes during a time when more than 4 million refugees have fled Syria and the surrounding region because the Islamic State is intent on driving out Christians and people of other faiths, including Muslims who disagree with their theology. It also comes while this country is divided between those who want to welcome the strangers and those who want to keep them out.

A month ago, there was a disagreement between Gov. Mike Pence and Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin. The governor asked that no Syrian refugees be resettled in Indiana because of safety concerns after the archdiocese’s Refugee and Immigrant Services had made arrangements to bring a family to Indianapolis. Archbishop Tobin met with the governor and listened to his concerns, but then made the decision to bring the family here. It consists of a husband, wife and two small children who escaped from Syrian violence three years ago, and then spent two years in refugee camps undergoing extensive security checks.

It was inevitable that there would be a collision between the government and the archbishop when Pence tried to keep Syrains out. Archbishop Tobin made the decision as did an act of submission of his fidelity to the teachings of the Church, as a way to practice what it preaches. The United States should be receiving many more Syrian refugees because it is supposed to be a country that welcomes refugees and immigrants. That’s why we have the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, which has welcomed strangers since 1886, although most immigrants now enter the United States other than by ship.

European countries, especially Germany and Sweden, are showing more compassion for refugees than the United States. Germany took in more than 1 million refugees during 2015, knowing full well that there’s a possibility that Islamist terrorists might infiltrate those refugees.

We can understand people’s fears that such terrorists would also try to enter the United States. But how many terrorists would have the patience to spend a couple years in refugee camps and go through interrogations? We wouldn’t be letting everyone in, as the European countries had to do because of the vast number of refugees.

In his statement about the resettlement of the Syrian family, Archbishop Tobin said, “For 40 years, the archdiocese’s Refugee and Immigrant Services has welcomed people fleeing violence in various regions of the world.”

Then he emphasized, “This is an essential part of our identity as Catholic Christians, and we will continue this life-saving tradition.” It’s not only Syrian refugees, of course. We still have the challenge of refugees from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. They are mainly women and children, and often children traveling by themselves, who are trying to escape the armed gangs that are terrorizing those countries.

These refugees were in the news a year ago when more than 66,000 children arrived at our southern border in several months. But the crisis has not disappeared, and the United Nations refugee agency said recently, “With authorities often unable to curb the violence and provide redress, many vulnerable women are left with no choice but to run for their lives.”

There’s a difference between refugees and immigrants. Refugees are those who are fleeing violence, who “have a credible and reasonable fear of persecution or torture.” Immigrants are those who are trying to make better lives for themselves than they can do in their countries.

The Catholic Church aids both refugees and immigrants. The Church has long called for reform of our immigration laws to make it possible for more migrants to enter the country legally, especially to keep families together.

Pope Francis has frequently asked countries to welcome migrants and facilitate their integration. On Dec. 15, he said, “Special concern should be paid to those who are fleeing violence, who “have a credible or reasonable fear of persecution or torture.” Immigrants are those who are trying to make better lives for themselves than they can do in their countries. The Catholic Church aids both refugees and immigrants.

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The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary because of space limitations, past sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but for serious reasons names may be withheld. Send letters to “Letters to the Editor,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are published in the Criterion as part of the newspaper’s commitment to “the responsible exchange of freely-held and expressed opinion among the people of God” (Communio et Presbyter, 116).

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible. Letters should be informed, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

Be Our Guest

John Garvey

‘Ex Corde Ecclesiae’ after 25 years

I recently attended a conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s declaration “Gaudium et Spes” and the 25th anniversary of the apostolic constitution “Ex Corde Ecclesiae.” These are two important documents governing the business of Catholic education. I was particularly interested in the second document, which St. John Paul II created about Catholic universities. In public debates about Catholic higher education, we devote a lot of attention to issues of censorship—polices about speakers and student activities and free-thinking faculty. It’s as if what makes a Catholic university distinctive is what can’t be said.

Surprising how little “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” has to say about this. It’s more concerned with what we have to offer—what a student would find at a Catholic university that he or she could not find somewhere else. We often talk about the Catholic intellectual tradition. What exactly is that?

Michael Polanyi, a Hungarian chemist, coined the phrase “procesus coherenter” to a group of people working on a jigsaw puzzle. Each time someone fixes a piece in, other folks look to see what steps this advance has made possible.

Polanyi added that this kind of cooperation would be possible if each person had a different understanding of the task at hand—if, for example, one person thought that pieces ought to be stacked rather than fitted together. A governing perspective or worldview determines what is to be created. It provides the environment that cultivates discovery.

I thought of Polanyi at our conference, which was held at Castel Gandolfo in Italy. There is a church there, designed by the Italian artist Bernini and dedicated to St. Thomas of Villanova. It has a pretty, coffered dome with ribs radiating from the top, an idea Bernini took from Pietro da Cortona’s renovation of the church Santa Maria della Pace.

It’s not the only example of Bernini borrowing from his sculptor. “Cneus and Anchises with Ascanius” drew on Raphael’s fresco “The Fire in the Borgo” at the Vatican.

This sort of thing went on all the time in the Catholic artistic culture of 17th-century Rome. There was a shared conception of the beautiful, a shared vocabulary of types. There were shared solutions to engineering and architectural problems. It subsumes nothing from the beauty and the genius of Bernini that he worked within this culture. When “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” was published in 1990, there was some consensus in academic circles about its direction that, where possible, Catholics should comprise a majority of the faculty at a Catholic university—and all teachers should embrace the mission of the university.

This was taken as meddling by the Church in matters properly academic. It seemed to pose an impediment to the universities’ desire for academic excellence because it would limit the pool of candidates available for faculty positions.

No doubt it does. So does a requirement that teachers have doctorates. The objection treats the Catholic faith as if it were an arbitrary handicap imposed on the search, rather than a reasonable trait to be looked for in a candidate.

This does not mean that Catholic faith is a sinister intrusion that destroys the value of Catholic or non-Catholic equal and important members of a Catholic university community. But if it’s part of the university’s business to carry on the Catholic intellectual tradition, we should expect Catholics to carry the ball.

What John Paul II’s approach in “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” is its intrinsic modesty. It says to Catholic universities, in effect: “You’re a Catholic university. You have a Catholic culture; it is not the business of the hierarchy to do this for you. It’s for the academics to do the thing. Only the Church asks that Catholics, working together, do the work of creating it.”

—John Garvey (The Catholic University of America in Washington.)

Letters to the Editor

Receiving Hail Mary a good practice for extraordinary ministers of holy Communion

It’s no note in one church where I attended Sunday Mass that the extraordinary ministers of holy Communion, arriving at the altar to distribute the holy Eucharist, pressed the nozzles on a bottle of antiseptic lotion onto their hands, and gently rubbed them prior to giving Communion to the recipients.

The medical world emphasizes handwashing with a germicide before dining, preparing meals or greeting other folks with your handshake. Now the length of time you rub your hands is critical for the diminution of bad bacteria.
Dios es la misericordia, paz y justicia para todos

Comenzamos cada nuevo año con una ferviente oración por la paz. Ahelamos el mundo del mañana, el momento en el que no existirán más desavenencias entre personas, familias, vecinos y naciones. Y celebramos el nacimiento del Príncipe de la Paz, nos inunda la esperanza de que su venida nos inspirará a vivir de un modo distinto. Comenzamos cada nuevo año con la profunda esperanza de poder dejar a un lado la envidia, los temores, nuestros deseos por adquirir el control económico y el dominio político, nuestro rechazo a aquellos que proponen de tierras extranjeras y la incomodidad frente aquellos distintos de nosotros. Rezamos por la paz pero olvidamos que la misericordia que practica la gente humilde es el único camino que conduce a la paz. Los cristianos creen que la paz verdadera y duradera proviene única y exclusivamente del Hijo de Dios, nuestro Señor Jesucristo, que fue enviado a este mundo por su Padre, nuestro Dios, en nombre de Jesús. Es por ello que cada año nuevo recordamos la promesa que le hizo el Señor a David: “Durante su vida yo le daré a Israel paz y reposo [...] y él será mi hijo, y yo seré su padre” (1 Cr 22:9). “Bienaventurados todos los pacíficos, porque ellos serán llamados hijos de Dios” (Mt 5:9). Nos convertimos en hijos de Dios cuando nos reconciliamos con Él. A través de nuestro bautismo y nuestra comunión con Él y a través de la Iglesia. Pero cuando perdemos de vista a Dios por obra de nuestra ceguera, egoísmo y pecado, no puede existir la paz. Es entonces cuando sobreviene la injusticia, la violencia y la crueldad que dominan el orden mundial, y la paz se desintegra, tanto en nuestros corazones como nuestros hogares, en nuestras comunidades y países, así como en el resto del mundo. La paz verdadera, aquella que perdura, ocurre cuando abramos en pos de la justicia; es el producto de la ardua labor de la civilización, la regia de derecho y el orden correcto de las estructuras sociales. La paz requiere equidad, respeto por la dignidad humana y negarse a aprovecharse de las debilidades de los demás. Tal como lo expresó el papa Pablo VI durante la Jornada Mundial de la Paz el 1 de enero de 1972: “Si quieres la paz traba la justicia.” Y esto significa que debemos desempeñar este trabajo tanto en nuestra localidad como en todo el mundo. La paz duradera, aquella que es más que un cese el fuego temporal o un receso periódico entre actividades hostiles, es el efecto de la caridad. La paz verdadera no existe sin misericordia y sin disposición de sacrificarnos quienes tenemos intereses individuales, tanto colectivos, por el bien de una genuina armonía. Si deseamos la paz, debemos abandonar nuestro deseo de venganza y debemos estar dispuestos a que las viejas heridas sanen mediante la gracia salvadora y misericordia de Dios. Esto es uno de los motivos por el que nuestro Santo Padre, el papa Francisco, proclamó el año Santo de la Misericordia. En la bula papal titulada “Misericordiae Vultus” (El rostro de la misericordia), el papa Francisco explica que en Jesucristo, Dios ha revelado su misericordia a los pueblos de todas las naciones, idiomas y culturas. Es éste el gran misterio que celebramos el día de la misericordia: que los heridos sanen mediante la gracia salvadora y misericordia de Dios. Esta es una de las razones de fe que los cristianos tenemos para celebrar el 25 de noviembre como el “corazón palpitante del Evangelio”. Se acerca el año Santo de la Misericordia. Estamos animados por la promesa de que este año de la Misericordia sea un momento particular para que los católicos reflexionen sobre lo misericordioso que ha sido Dios con nosotros y para comprender mejor a aquellos que estamos llamados a ser misericordiosos con los demás. Su Santidad describe la misericordia como el “corazón palpitante del Evangelio”. Y comienza expresando: “¿Cómo deseamos que los años por venir estén impregnados de misericordia para poder al encuentro de cada persona llevarla la bondad y la ternura de Dios? A todos, creyentes y no creyentes, pueda llegar el bálsamo de la misericordia consoladora del Reino de Dios que está ya presente en medio de nosotros.” Según afirma el Santo Padre, ningún aspecto de las enseñanzas y los testimonios de la Iglesia debe carecer de misericordia. La paz solo es posible cuando podemos comprender que la paz no es una meta a la que aspiramos como pueblo de Dios con nuestros hermanos y hermanas de todo el mundo. Cuando el día 31 de diciembre, las naciones se unirán en un orden mundial que respete los derechos humanos fundamentales y la auténtica diversidad cultural de naciones y pueblos. Los vecinos se ayudarán y se respetarán mutuamente; las familias vivirán juntas y con alegría, y cada hombre y mujer sobre la faz de la tierra estarán en calma, sin preocupaciones y en paz. Que la paz de Cristo esté siempre con nosotros. A través de la intercesión de la Santa Virgen María, la Reina de la Paz, y de todos los santos, especialmente nuestros patronos, San Francisco Xavier y Santa Teodora Guérin, que encontremos la felicidad y la alegría al trabajar en favor de la justicia y el compartir con los demás la abundante misericordia divina en nombre de Jesús. Mi oración para usted y para todos nuestros hermanos y hermanas del centro y del sur de Indiana es que lleguemos a conocer la paz en 2016. ¿Qué podemos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? Que podamos compartir esa paz con los demás? 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January 8

January 10
St. Michael the Archangel Church, 335 W. 30th St., Indianapolis. Mass in French, 1 p.m. Information: 317-523-4193 or e/c/id2014@gmail.com.

St. Therese of the Infant Jesus Church, little Flowerhouse, 4720 E. 130th St., Indianapolis. Class of ‘33 monthly gathering, 6 p.m. Mass, optional dinner afterward. Information: 317-406-6396.

January 12
St. Simon the Apostle Parish, 8155 Oaklandon Road, Indianapolis. Creatin Model of Fertility Care, “Know Your Body, Love Your Spouse,” 6:30-8:30 p.m. $50. Information: 317-721-7332 or 317-219-9492.

January 14
St. Michael the Archangel Parish, Carmel (house on parish grounds). Indianapolis. Hope and Healing Survivors of Suicide support group, 7 p.m. Information: 317-851-8344.

January 15

January 16
Helpers of God’s Precious Infants, Indianapolis, Mass and Divine Mercy Chapel at 8:30 a.m. at St. Michael the Archangel Church, 335 W. 30th St., followed by prayer at the little Marian retreat center and continued prayer for the church for those who wish to remain.

January 21
St. Joseph Parish, 1375 S. Mickley Ave., Indianapolis. Third Thursday Adoration, intercessory worship for the ending of the 40 days of pregnancy, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass at 5:45 p.m.

January 28

January 30
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Parish Hall, 14969 Oak Ridge Road, in Carmel, Ind. (Lafayette Diocese). Presentation by Kent Kramer, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana, on human trafficking, followed by fashion show with sales supporting women affected by trafficking, 7 p.m. Information: Diane Conover at 317-430-3448 or diane.conover@the-global.net.

February 3
Archbishop O’Meara Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. John Seelers, Catholic, educational, charitable, and social singles, 50 and over, single, separated, widowed or divorced. New singles accepted. Information: 317-243-0777.

February 5
Marian University chapel, 3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis. Lumen Dei Catholic Business Mass, Mass and monthly meeting, 6:30-8:30 a.m., breakfast is served. Information: 317-435-3447 or lumen.dci@comcast.net.

February 6
Most Holy Name of Jesus, 8911 N. Himalaya Ave., Indianapolis. First Friday devotion, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, 1 p.m.,玫瑰 of the Sacred Heart and prayers for the Holy Father, 7:30 p.m. Information: 317-784-5454.

February 7
Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. First Friday celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mass 4:55 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament following Mass until 9:30 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-866-2691 or www.lumen.dei.org.

February 6
Helpers of God’s Precious Infants Prayers Vigil, Terre Haute, 7:30 a.m. Mass at the Carmelite Monastery at 59 Allendale, 9:25 a.m. parking on Ohio Blvd., 9:30 a.m. available on sidewalk in front of Planned Parenthood at 30th St. 3rd for prayers, 10 a.m. travel to St. Patrick Adamson Chapel at 1807 Poplar St. for Divine Mercy Chapel, completed around 10:30 a.m.

February 7

February 10
The Willows, 6729 Westfield Blvd., Indianapolis. Marriage on Tap, Mogi Joseph P. Schaefer, presenter, 7-9:30 p.m., $35 per couple includes dinner, cash bar available, registration required at www.athlete.com or call 317-259-4737.

February 11
Holy Family Parish, 815 W. Main St. Richmond. Chocolate Fest and silent auction, 5-8 p.m., $5 adults, $5 children 6-12 years of age. $3 per couple includes dinner, advance ticket only. Information: 765-935-2522 or Karen rhum@comcast.net.

February 12
St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Conventual Franciscan Brother Bob Baxter, presenter. ‘The Vocations of the Mystical Body of Christ.’ Word of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Lectio Divina Series, one session of four, Providence Sister Mary Moloney, presenter, 10-11:30 a.m., $40 per person for the series. Information: 812-535-2923 or provctr@spsmw.org.

February 14

Robert Muse, co-founder and president of the American Freedom Law Center (AFLC)—the lead firm representing Priests for Life against the United States Supreme Court in their opposition of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) mandate—will speak in the Psychological Aggression Room at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, 14596 Oak Ridge Road, in Carmel, Ind., in the Lafayette Diocese, at 7 p.m. on Jan. 16.

An expert on constitutional law, will discuss the legal battle underway in the U.S. to ensure that religious freedom, faith and pro-life values are protected. By presenting arguments before the United States Supreme Court on behalf of Priests for Life in March opposing the HHS mandate—which requires organizations to reject their religious convictions and pay for contraception and sterilization on the grounds of four, Providence Sister Mary Moloney, “Lectio Divina Series,” Sunday with a Saint, “Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Lively Virtues,” 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. $41 per person.

February 18
Our Lady of Fatima Parish, 335 W. 30th St., Indianapolis. Silent self-guided days, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., $30 per person. Information: 317-545-7681 or www.archindy.org/fatima.

February 22
St. Patrick Parish, 1807 Poplar St., in Terre Haute, is planning a celebration of the 60th anniversary of its church building on Jan. 17.

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin will celebrate Mass at 9 a.m., followed by a reception and program in the St. Patrick Family Life Center.

In 1954, the parish launched a campaign to raise $423,000 for construction costs and buildings.

Ground was broken for the new church on March 17, 1955, and the new church building was dedicated on Jan. 15, 1956. The church, which seats 300, is constructed of Indiana limestone with St. Meinrad sandstone on the interior walls.

Reservations for the celebration can be made by contacting Geri March phone at 812-238-1656 or e-mail at victorian1411@gmail.com.

For a complete list of retreats as reported to theCriterion, which can be found at www.archindy.org/retr cares
Made a resolution to improve your health this year? Try these health/faitth improving methods to strengthen connection with God

By Natalie Hoefer

Raise your hand if you made a New Year’s resolution to shed some pounds or improve your health in 2016.

I paused a moment to raise my hand, too, before resuming typing. I stand—and walk, and jog and stretch—in solidarity with those seeking to improve their health this year.

There are many sound reasons for pursuing such a goal—feeling better, breathing easier, enjoying life without having a hate relationship with your wardrobe.

But the Catholic Church teaches that there is more to health than improving one’s physique. As St. Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God …?” (1 Cor 6:19)

Referring to this Scripture passage, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The human body shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’; it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit: Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity.” (4634)

To improve one’s health by focusing only on the body addresses just a part of the equation. As the catechism states above, one can’t be healthy bodily if one is not healthy emotionally and spiritually.

With this in mind, I’ve compiled a list of resources I’m familiar with that seek to improve at least two if not all three components of the body/mind/soul connection, particularly uniting prayer and improving your relationship to God. This is hardly an exhaustive list—a Google search on “Catholic exercise” and “Catholic weight loss” provides more ideas.

Perhaps one or more of these or other body/mind/soul-related resources is just what God is calling you to this year, so that your walking, hiking or jogging will draw you closer to him, as well as improve and nourish the temple he gave you.

Many of these resources focus their efforts on those wishing to lose weight, as John the Baptist said in the third chapter of the Gospel of John: “May Christ intercede for us!” (3:30)

“Tending the Temple: 365 days of spiritual and physical devotions” by Kevin Vost, Shane Kapler and Peggy Bowes. A book that offers a saints biography, physical and spiritual exercise for each day of the year. For example: March 17—do a set of sit-ups, one for each item in the “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” prayer: “Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me. Christ in me, Christ with me. Christ take the place you set on me, and rise on me as you slowly lower back to the floor.”

“The Rosary Workout by Peggy Bowes. A book that provides instructions and guidance on praying the rosary while walking or jogging, with varying levels of workout intensity based on one’s level of health.

“SoulCore Project workouts by Deanne Miller and Colleen Scariano. A workout that combines mat-based, core-strengthening moves with the prayers of the rosary. For more information, a list of classes or to purchase a DVD, log on to www.soulcore.com.

“The Light Weight and One King by Suzanne Foulé. A 12-week program for those suffering from compulsive overeating, binge eating and other eating disorders. Not just about weight loss or gain or dieting, the program promotes turning to God—with the help of other tools like attending meetings, reading OA literature and developing a food plan—to address physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. For more information or for a list of meeting sites and dates, log on to www.oa.org.


“Overcomes Anonymous (OA). A 12-step program for those suffering from compulsive overeating, binge eating and other eating disorders. Not just about weight loss or gain or dieting, the program promotes turning to God—with the help of other tools like attending meetings, reading OA literature and developing a food plan—to address physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. For more information or for a list of meeting sites and dates, log on to www.oa.org.

“Catholic weight loss” provides more ideas. To learn more or to start a group, log on to www.lightweigh.com

“Powerful Praying through the Bible: 365 Days of Prayers of the Rosary” by Nancy Gugliotta, with 365 short prayers for each day of the year. For more information or to order, log on to www.lightweigh.com.

Lending Based on Family Values: Honesty, Sincerity, Integrity Partnership: Refinance, Delta Consolidation Loans (Conventional, FHA, VA), Rural Housing Home Loans (177), 235-0002 or (866) 898-8264 on line 38 locations at www.grandviewlending.com

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Local Catholic Company serving the Archdiocese of Indianapolis

White House strives to clear up misconceptions about religion that cause religious discrimination

WASHINGTON (CNS)—People who attended a recent forum sponsored by the White House ignored the old adage not to speak about religion or politics in public.

They were members of a variety of faiths—or no faith at all—focused not so much on their own religious beliefs, but on how to get rid of misconceptions around religion that cause divisions, religious discrimination and even violence.

“Tending the Temple: 365 days of spiritual and physical devotions” by Kevin Vost, Shane Kapler and Peggy Bowes. A book that offers a saint biography, physical and spiritual exercise for each day of the year.
The raid is going on, the sirens are going off…

Among the mountains and hills of western Hungary lies Europe’s largest freshwater lake in central Europe. Moko grew up along the shores of the lake, a region she remembers for its beauty.

But now in that town, the doors and windows because if a bomb falls the pressure will blow them out. If I’m home by myself, everything is open, the raid is going on, the sirens are going off front porch crying.

I got the biggest gift … my faith

After a short while, Leslie asked Maria if he might court her. Still mourning, she said, “I couldn’t answer,” she said. “I was still grieving. But I liked him and he was so kind and sweet and just a beautiful person.”

He was also seven years her senior. Leslie had started training as a labor force after leaving the University of Miskolc. After Maria rejected Leslie’s offer to court, a friend advised her to go to his house to console him. Maria took the advice and found Leslie laughing at her without tending a garden in the backyard. Leslie looked up, and I will never forget, he was as white as a sheet when he saw me,” she recalled. “Every drop of blood went out of his head. And he looked at me and he said, ‘Mom, this is my fiance’.

“Suddenly we were not allowed to do any kind of work whatsoever, as the [third] commandment tells you,” she said. “Saturday in the morning we had to clean the house by noon. We had a nice lunch, and the afternoon was Maria’s holiday. We honored her and prayed a special prayer to her. She is my mom—I love her.

Maria and Leslie shared their devotion to God. Maria and prayer, reciting the rosary each night with their two daughters until the girls left for college.

When he was little, he decided he wanted to be a mechanic, and when Leslie was 20, was in a serious accident. I wanted to be a university student at that time,” she said. “I was still grieving. But I liked him and he was so kind and sweet and just a beautiful person.”

He was also seven years her senior. Leslie had started training as a labor force after leaving the University of Miskolc. After Maria rejected Leslie’s offer to court, a friend advised her to go to his house to console him. Maria took the advice and found Leslie laughing at her without tending a garden in the backyard. Leslie looked up, and I will never forget, he was as white as a sheet when he saw me,” she recalled. “Every drop of blood went out of his head. And he looked at me and he said, ‘Mom, this is my fiance’.

“That was it. I was hooked,”

Maria met Leslie at a university in Miskolc, the second largest city in Hungary. Both were studying engineering.

The only woman [at the university] at that time,” she said. “I was always adventurous. I wanted to be somewhere else.

For Leslie, it was love at first sight. But Maria, then 20, was in a serious relationship with the son of the family she lived with in Miskolc. When he was killed in a motorcycle accident at the age of 22, Maria was heartbroken.

After a short while, Leslie asked Maria if he might court her. Still mourning, she told him no.

“We walked away so sad,” she said. A friend asked Maria if she loved Leslie. “I couldn’t answer,” she said. “I was still grieving. But I liked him and he was so kind and sweet and just a beautiful person.”

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“Though they were separating, they were still going down and crawl in the furrows as search lights swept by. Finally, Maria could take no more.

“In no time, everyone [was] off the train, running every which way we could," Maria recalled.

The train headed west. It was four o’clock in the afternoon, and the sun was setting. When Maria and Leslie arrived in Budapest, the flagman informed the conductor that military was waiting at the station to arrest all the people on the train.

“Not to, everyone [was] off the train, running every which way we could,” Maria recalled.

She, Leslie and six other men headed toward what they believed to be the Austrian border.

“Sleep all night,” Maria said. “We didn’t know if we were walking around and around. And then we got closer to the border because we could hear guns and machine guns.”

Walking through an unharvested cornfield, the refugees could hardly hear the sirens and in the furrows as search lights swept by. Finally, Maria could take no more.

Having no food or drink or sleep all night, they decided to rest on a haystack where they could sleep and investigate some lights in the distance. As the gray dawn illuminated the landmark, the group gathered around and directed their young man to a nearby garage. “He asked the Holy Spirit to help me, then closed my eyes and pointed my finger on a name and motioned for [the mechanic] to call that number,” she said. “He put his dime in and dialed. When he started to talk, I took [the phone] away from him and I started to speak Hungarian. And [the woman] spoke Hungarian back.”

With the woman’s help, and the assistance of the mechanic and the bus driver whose bus she was put on, Maria found her way to Lilly. Through an interpreter, she relayed why she was four hours late for her first day on the job. “And then I lost it and sobbed uncontrollably,” she said.

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Above, photos of a young Maria and Leslie in Hungary in 1952, a map of the country as it appeared before the end of World War II. In her home in Indianapolis on Nov. 12, Maria Moko shows the photos and stories of the couple’s escape from communist Hungary 59 years ago. (Photos by Nicole Workman)

Right, Maria Moko holds a photo of her husband to her heart as she sorts through old pictures at her home in Indianapolis on Nov. 12.

[The head of personnel] called a taxi and sent me home. And he ordered a taxi for two days until I got [the bus route down]. I couldn’t believe how wonderful America was.”

“God was holding my hand the whole time.”

By the time Leslie was released from the hospital in Hungary, Maria had rented a furnished room, kitchen and a shared bathroom in a downtown home. Leslie soon got a job at a civil engineering firm. Maria went on to work for various engineering companies, retiring from Rolls Royce 12 years ago.

The Mokos purchased a home in 1959 in the boundaries of the newly established St. Monica Parish on the city’s northwest side. Maria lives in that home to this day. The Moko’s daughters, who lives in Denmark, flew home to see him.

Maria worships at Mass daily. She is also a member of one of St. Monica Parish’s small Church communities, and is a member of the parish’s Young at Heart group.

She plays bridge and likes to work in her yard, keeping her flowers blooming and caring for the home that Leslie shared for 53 years. “I’m always happy to have my faith. And I was blessed to have Leslie as my soulmate.”

Moko continued from page 1
Christ’s birth can bring peace, hope to suffering world, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Christ’s birth is a reminder that through the birth of Christ, hope and peace are possible and that only through this grace can humanity find peaceful solutions to the world’s most difficult problems, Pope Francis said.

“Only God’s mercy can free humanity from the many forms of evil, at times monstrous evil, which selfishness spawns in our midst,” the pope said on Dec. 25.

“Where God is born, hope is born. Where God is born, peace is born. And where peace is born, there is no longer room for hatred and for war.”

Heightened security around St. Peter’s Square did little to dampen the spirits of the estimated 50,000 people attending the pope’s solemn Christmas blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city and the world). Many in the crowd dressed festively, and applauded the music of the Vatican’s marching band.

However, police and anti-terrorism task forces were a visible sign of a world that would end the “conflict which has long set them at odds, with grave repercussions for the entire region.”

The pope also prayed that recently approved agreements would bring a quick end to the wars affecting Syria and Libya, two countries ravaged by war for several years. He also prayed that the international community would find ways to end atrocities in Iraq, Yemen, Congo, Burundi, South Sudan and Ukraine.

“ Victims of terrorism were also in the pope’s thoughts and prayers as he remembered the victims of the Russian airliner bombed in Egyptian airspace and terrorist attacks in Beirut and Paris; Bamako, Mali and Tunis, Tunisia.

Christians persecuted for their faith were remembered as the pope prayed that “the Child Jesus grant consolation and strength to those suffering.”

Recalling the thousands of refugees and migrants fleeing poverty and war, Pope Francis compared the lack of respect for their dignity to the situation of Christ who was born into the world suffering “cold, poverty and rejection.”

“May our closeness today be felt by those who are most vulnerable, especially child soldiers—women who suffer violence, and the victims of human trafficking and the drug trade,” he said.

As the Church celebrates the Holy Year of Mercy, the pope said mercy is the “most precious gift which God gives us,” and that the Church cannot discover that tender love of our heavenly Father for each of us.

The bells of St. Peter’s Basilica pealed at midnight, just as they did late on Dec. 24 when thousands packed the church for Christmas Mass. Hundreds of people who could not find room in the basilica braved the cold weather and watched on giant screens from St. Peter’s Square.

With his voice noticeably hoarse from a bout of flu, the pope said in his homily that the prophetic words of Isaiah are those of a fulfilled promise of joy and gladness that are “a sure sign that the message contained in the mystery of this night is truly from God.”

Doubt and indifference, he stressed, should be left to skeptics, who “by looking to reason alone, never find the truth.”

“There is no room for the indifference which reigns in the hearts of those unable to love for fear of losing something,” he said. “All sadness has been banished, for the Child Jesus brings true comfort to every heart.”

The birth of Jesus, he continued, is a call for all Christians “to put away all fear and dread,” and to follow the path that leads to Christ “who has been ‘born to us’ (Is 9.5), he was ‘given to us’ as the prophet foretold.”

The coming of Christ into the world, the pope said, shows what is truly essential in life. Despite his birth into the “nothingness” of poverty, Jesus shows men and women who are simple of heart the path of “authentic liberation and perennial redemption” while giving them strength to reject “godless ways and the richness of the world.”

“In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, that Child calls us to act soberly in other words, in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential,” he said.

Christians, the pope said, are called to cultivate a sense of justice, discernment and doing God’s will in a world that is often “merciless to the sinner and lenient to the sin.”

As a choral rendition of “Silent Night” echoed through the basilica during the distribution of Communion, many attending the Mass were visibly moved.

A man looking reverently toward the main altar shed a single tear while smiling; gazing with the eyes that Pope Francis said in his homily all Christians are called to look upon the Baby Jesus.

“Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we too, with eyes full of amazement and wonder, gaze upon the Child Jesus, the Son of God. And in his presence may our hearts burst forth in prayer: ‘Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation,’” the pope said. 

Pope Francis recognizes miracle needed to declare Mother Teresa a saint

Pope Francis has approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, paving the way for her canonization in 2016. Mother Teresa is seen during a visit to Phoenix, Ariz., in 1988. (CNS file photo/Ken Hamele)
Valley Park, Mo. (CNS)—About 8:30 on a chilly morning on Dec. 30, Mickey Downing of the Valley Park Fire District went house to house in lower Valley Park, knocking on doors and asking people to evacuate for their safety with the Meramec River nearing the top of the levee protecting the small town.

The levee gate was built to withstand a crest of 42 feet and 6 inches, a foot lower than the Army Corps of Engineers predicted crest of 43 feet and 6 inches between midnight of that day and 6 a.m. on Dec. 31. The levee itself could withstand a 44-foot crest. The record crest was 39, set in 1982. Most of Downing’s knocks in the community 20 miles southwest of St. Louis went unanswered, which was good news—residents already had sought higher ground. Most of the few who answered were packed and ready to leave. A few diehards were staying behind, hoping to stay dry. However, Dixie Freeman was neither a diehard nor an evacuee. She was stranded, with her disabled 94-year-old mother, a couple of dogs and a cockpit. She also was cold, shivering in the 33-degree air as she approached Downing a couple of blocks from her home. She wore lightweight pants and a green knitted sweater.

“Can you help?” she asked Downing. He quickly learned how dire her situation was. She had no phone, no way to communicate with anyone, and a broken-down car. A son was expected to be on his way, but his arrival was uncertain because of flooding and road closures in his area. Freeman, her mother Nora Dell, dogs Rocky and Fifi, and the cockpit were stuck.

“My hands are really full,” she said. “Oh, boy, it’s hard.” Downing quickly offered advice. “I am recommending you go to City Hall for transportation and then go to [Sacred Heart] Church as a shelter, especially since you don’t have wheels to get out,” he said.

A couple of bystanders volunteered to take Freeman, her mother and the pets to City Hall, where buses were waiting to evacuate residents. After a few phone calls and help from city workers, bus driver Tamekia Davis drove Freeman to her home, where Rocky and Fifi scammed about as she gathered belongings in a couple of suitcases and grocery bags. However, Nora didn’t want to leave. A diabetic, she is partially deaf. She is also blind and uses a walker or a wheelchair.

“We are doing with me? What are you doing with me?” she asked, repeatedly. Freeman assured her that everything was all right, that they had to leave for their safety. Freeman again faced the prospect of losing everything, as happened in the 1982 flood.

Ultimately, Nora agreed to leave, but she pleaded to bring her dog. “I want my Rocky. I want my Rocky,” she said. A veterinarian came for the cockpit. Downing came by with a couple of other firefighters, and Davs got everyone, including Rocky and Fifi, on the bus for the one-mile ride to Sacred Heart.

There, pastor Father Denny Schaab greeted them with open arms. Vehicles from lower Valley Park, including U.S. Postal Service trucks and vans from a food pantry, already filled the parking.

In an agreement with Fire Chief Rick Wilken, a parishioner, Father Schaab opened the church basement for a shelter, as the parish had done during previous floods. But there was a hitch because the Red Cross had not yet arrived to coordinate efforts, even as parishioners steadily called to volunteer to help.

Father Schaab worked his smartphone and discovered that the Red Cross was shifting the shelter to another church because the flood waters threatened the parish site. Davis reloaded the bus with Freeman and her crew and off they went again—hopefuly to eventually return to a dry home, but with uncertainty hanging over their heads.

“We pray for the best,” Father Schaab said, watching them drive away.

Elsewhere, parishes in areas of the St. Louis Archdiocese affected by flooding responded to people in need and made plans for a coordinated community response.

Keep in your prayers,” said Pam Manuel, parish secretary at St. Bridget of Kildare Parish in Pacific, 35 miles southwest of St. Louis. The parish is allowing people affected by the flooded Meramec River to leave their vehicles and boats in its parking lot, which overlooks the low-lying, water-logged southern end of the city. Calls came from people seeking housing and while housing options are limited, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference at the parish is assisting displaced residents.

Manual is president of the Pacific Lions Club, which has received a grant from Lions Club International to purchase food, water, mops, buckets, gloves and “pretty much anything people will need to get their homes cleaned up,” she said.

Most Sacred Heart Parish in Eureka, not far from St. Bridget, also worked on plans to respond on Dec. 30. The former head of the parish’s Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference, who has experience from two previous floods, was among those being consulted. The parish gym was being considered as a place for programs, according to parish staff.

Staff at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in south St. Louis were glad that sandbagging of the River des Peres was completed, but they remained on edge in case the water tops the levee. The parish buildings were a possible source of shelter in a community response. Parishioners were among the volunteers in the sandbagging effort.

St. Mark Parish in nearby suburban Affton had some water damage in the chapel of its school. The Arnold Food Pantry, which has worked with Immaculate Conception Parish in Arnold and volunteers from nearby St. David Parish, assisted flood victims in northern Jefferson County.

St. Louis area parishes respond to victims of record flooding

St. Louis area parishes respond to victims of record flooding

Floodwaters from the nearby Meramec River fill the traffic lanes of I-44 and Missouri Route 141 on Dec. 30 in Valley Park, just outside St. Louis.

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**Marriage ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Be a part of our Spring Marriage Edition

Feb. 5, 2016, issue of The Criterion

If you are planning your wedding between Jan. 30 and July 1, 2016, we invite you to submit the information for an announcement on the form below.

E-mailed photos

Photos should be saved in jpg format and be a minimum 300 dpi resolution. Color photos are preferred. We recommend if possible, to have a photo where the couple’s faces are close to each other. Please send your photos as an attachment to the e-mail: MKlein@archchd.org. Subject line: Spring Marriage (Last name). In the e-mail, please include the information in the form located at the bottom.

Deadline

All announcements and photos must be received by 10 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 21, 2016. (No announcements or photos will be accepted after this date.)

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**Use this form to furnish information**

- City and mail to: BRIDES, The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367 (Mail with photo, Monday, Jan. 18, 2016, at 5 p.m.)
- Please print or type:

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Dixie Freeman, who does not have a car or phone, needed to evacuate from her home in Valley Park, Mo. She is pictured comforting her 94-year-old disabled mother, Nora Dell, on Dec. 30 as floodwaters approached the levee capacity. She needed help to get her mother, two dogs and a cherished cockatiel out of the house. She went to City Hall to ask for help with the animals and transportation. (CNS photos/Lisa Johnston, St. Louis Review)
Discerning how to show mercy is a necessary challenge

By David Gibson

"This is the time for mercy." The present moment is the right time, a “favorable time,” to practice the works of mercy—to heal wounds and discover how to forgive and be reconciled with “everyone.”

Pope Francis made these points in a homily on April 11, 2015, as he looked ahead to the Holy Year of Mercy set to begin nearly eight months later in the worldwide Church.

The present moment is a “time for mercy,” just as every moment for Christians is the right time to live the Gospel.

Yet terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., in the last weeks of 2015 show how the world’s atmosphere is clouded from continent to continent by fierce feelings of anger and fear of future attacks.

Terrorism on the world stage illustrates just how complicated and challenging the Christian call to mercy is. What does it mean, or perhaps not mean, to act mercifully in a world like this one?

Do we still welcome the stranger or refugee, for example, thus practicing a key corporal work of mercy? Many also wonder how to practice the spiritual works of mercy now, not only comforting afflicted people but patiently bearing with those who “do us ill.”

The Holy Year of Mercy arrived on Dec. 8, preceded by days that, for the world at large, were a disquieting moment in time. Undoubtedly, though, this will prove an opportune time for penetrating explorations in the faith community of what the Gospel call to love enemies implies, or what forms compassion should assume in the actual world we inhabit.

Pope Francis realized in planning the Holy Year of Mercy that it would take place in a time “of great historical change.” He hoped it might be a time “to offer more evident signs of God’s presence” in this world.

Most people confront the all-too-real challenges of mercy close to home and not on the world stage. But that does not necessarily diminish the difficulty of acting compassionately toward others whose behavior hardly seems to invite this or of forgiving past wrongs done to us. Is memory an opponent of mercy? It can be sometimes.

The memory of feeling insulted or humiliated by someone is a necessary condition for living joyfully.”

Insults and wrongs include ourselves, Pope Francis said. “A man who has been wronged and has not forgiven, who has not been merciful, is always doing violence to his own soul.”

Mercy, he stressed, “is the only way to overcome evil. Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together.”

Clearly, it can be difficult to establish habits of mercy. Many other human habits take root slowly too—like the habit of good posture that my physical therapist insists upon for the well-being of my back. In a similar vein, Pope Francis insists that “to let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge is a necessary condition for living joyfully.”

Some habits of mercy target the physical well-being of others. These corporal works of mercy aim to assuage hunger, quench thirst, welcome strangers, heal the sick, visit prisoners, put clothes on the backs of those who need them or provide burial for the dead.

Other habits of mercy target a person’s heart and soul. Known as spiritual works of mercy, they endeavor, in the words of Pope Francis, to “counsel the doubtful, teach the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the sorrowful, forgive offences, patiently bear with troublesome people and pray to God for the living and the dead.”

Obviously, based on this list, the range of merciful actions is broad. But it is broader still, because a single work of mercy, like healing the sick, can be practiced in numerous ways.

A story told in the book Grieving With Your Whole Heart makes this point. Jamal Rahman, a Muslim imam who has served on Jesuit-run Seattle University’s adjunct faculty, recalled a conversation with a terminally ill friend, who said to him:

“If you feel awkward, feel awkward. That is healing to me. If you feel like crying, cry. That is healing to me. … If you feel you really want to tell me something, talk to me. Your words are healing to me.”

It may be necessary, then, to discover how to act mercifully by listening carefully to others and, as Pope Francis repeatedly recommends, accompanying them. Then the amazing range of ways to quench thirsts or satisfy hungers can rise to the surface. This is what the Holy Year of Mercy involves. It invites profound reflection on the demands of mercy in baffling times. It also prompts believers to rediscover mercy’s power to bring needed healing into the world right around them.

(David Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years.)

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are at the heart of Jesus’ teaching

By Daniel S. Mulhall

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are all found in the Gospels, especially in St. Matthew’s Gospel, and primarily in two passages: Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 25:31-46.

Matthew 5-7 contains the heart of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 25 focuses on the connection between people served in acts of mercy and Jesus: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Scripture scholars consider these passages in Matthew and Matthew’s “bookends” that establish the boundaries of Jesus’ teaching, from the beginning of his teaching until just before his Passion. Matthew 5-7 lays out the foundations of Jesus’ teaching, and Matthew 25 brings it to a close.

Everything in between can best be understood by these two sections of the teaching. They serve as a primer for what a follower of Jesus will do and how that follower will live.

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy serve as a shorthand synthesis of Jesus’ teaching. If you want to follow Jesus, then you have to practice these works of mercy, care for those in need, physically, emotionally, socially, psychologically and spiritually.

Chapters 5-7 in Matthew establish the attitudes Christians need to exhibit toward others. We are to be poor in spirit, meek, on fire for justice, yet merciful. We are to be lights in the darkness and seasoning in the blandness of life.

A disciple keeps the law and teaches others to do the same. A disciple treats others with kindness and dignity and forgives freely. A disciple is to be generous and helpful.

In these chapters, Jesus also teaches his disciples to pray and give alms, and to do it with the proper motives. “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no reward from your heavenly Father” (Mt 6:1).

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells of a time of judgment “when the Son of Man comes in his glory,” and those who are blessed are those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked and visited those who were ill or in prison. This is all actions that care for the physical well-being of the person.

Those who fail this test of discipleship are dismissed to “eternal punishment” (Mt 25:46).

The teaching that Jesus gave to his disciples still resonates with us today. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy tell us that we have an obligation to care for others because they are God’s creatures and in need of our help.

When we provide shelter for one who has none or comfort the afflicted, we show our love for God. When we counsel those in doubt or free those who are held captive, we bring light and hope where little previously existed. When we do each of these things for those in need, we do them for Jesus.

Each of the works of mercy is important, and all are needed. As Matthew’s Gospel makes clear, Christians are called to care for the entire person, mind and heart, body and soul.

(Daniel S. Mulhall is a freelance writer and a catechist for adults. He lives in Laurel, Maryland.)
Find the courage to say ‘yes’ to God’s plan in life

We recently celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family at Mass. I heard those words—“Holy Family” of Mary, Joseph and Jesus—over and over. Sadly, I can cite multiple examples during my childhood in a small Pennsylvania vacation wherein my family seemed far, far from the ideals expressed in that particular verse: “And they were in a place very different from where I wanted to be. No better mom, a better [the blank]… I need to be a [the blank]… I need to be a [the blank].”

At one point during Christmas vacation, when I truly needed to get out of the house, I visited a large mall. My mind was scattered and I just wanted to get away from the holiday cheer. So, I sat down on a mall bench under a tree that I thought would be a better, more peaceful place to be. Instead, the tree had been covered in a kind-hearted stepfather, to raise the redeemer of the world.

Sometimes pausing to reflect on where we are can be rather unsettling. And we were running out of time to do that. “You are here” to where we think we should be. A few of the priests’ homilies reflected on the Feast of the Holy Family, however, gave me great hope. He reminded us of the words from the First Book of John. “Moved to love, humble couple by the names of Mary and Joseph said ‘yes’ to God’s plan, even though it seemed impossible from a human point of view and changed the course of the world.

In this New Year, my prayer is that we all find the courage to follow the example of the Holy Family, saying yes to God’s plan, especially when that plan is not what we had envisioned, confident in God’s big “reveal.”

(Parri Lamb, a member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield, is a regular columnist for The Criterion. )

Looking Around

In the early 1960s, while the Second Vatican Council was in full swing, La Salle De La Salle Christian Brother remarked to me, “We’re trying to figure out whether the brothers are the tailfins of the clergy or the tailfins of the laity.”

An answer to that question is not as clear today. Although we have many years later from the Vatican II movement, there is a question about the identity and mission of the Religious Brother in the Church.

And the answer is: Forget about the lights—head or tail—and focus instead on the journey of fraternity.

The document makes the important point that “the vocation of the religious brother is, first of all, a Christian vocation.” And it adds that the identity and mission of the religious brother is summarized in the concept of fraternity, which is a gift that the religious brother receives from God. He shares this gift in his community, and offers it to others in the world. Just how that fraternity will be experienced is a matter of choice.

The De La Salle Christian Brothers express it in the schools. They are scholar-teachers, giving their students what they need: developers of human potential, who impart learning skills and readiness for career success. Founders by St. John Bosco, the De La Salle, who was an ordained priest, none of the LaSallian Christian Brothers is ordained to the priesthood.

Other communities of brothers, notably the Alexians, Brothers for the sick. Still other religious communities, like the Jesuits, Franciscans, Mariists and Marianists, have memberships that include both ordained and non-ordained religious. The brothers tend to take care of practical matters in the community, leaving direct sacramental and spiritual ministries to the ordained.

Retired New Orleans Archbishop Francis Schulte, himself a graduate of a Jesuit prep school and former superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, often remarked, without prejudice in either direction, how much more pleasant it was to hear someone say that he was a “Brothers” boy rather than a “Jesuit” product.

The vocation of the religious brother is an acknowledgement that God has called a particular man to serve his Church. By saying yes to the vocation, the religious brother is saying yes to the newness of life God has given him. He responds to God’s call by following the example of Jesus and the Apostles, who responded to God’s invitation to follow him.

(Jesuit Father William Byron is university professor of business and society at St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia. E-mail him at wbyron@sju.edu )
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord/April 10, 2016

Sunday Readings

Sunday, Jan. 10, 2016

- Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
- Acts 10:34-38

This weekend celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This is what happened. John the Baptist was preaching throughout the land, and he had gathered many admirers and many opponents as well, as later events were to prove. John’s call was blunt and uncompromising. He called the people to turn to God. Many had drifted away from the ancient faith of Israel. Many utterly had rejected God. The temptation to spurn God was strong. God seemingly had deserted the Jewish people. They were hardly prosperous. The land was not flowing with milk and honey, as God had promised to Moses. Most of all, the brutal, pagan Romans reigned supreme, their blood-stained heel pressing heavily upon every aspect of life.

Into this bleak situation came John. Jesus then entered the picture as the promised Savior when John baptized him. The first reading is from the third section of Isaiah, written long before the Lord’s baptism but in times equally bad for the Jews. Central to the reading is an absolutely faithful figure, God’s “servant” (Is 42:1). God chose this servant and sent him to the people to teach them and to lead them to peace.

The servant was a “light” not only to Israel but to all “the nations” (Is 42:6). This broad aspect of the servant’s mission was a prelude to the Christian belief that Christ came to save all people, irrespective of any condition or circumstance.

The second reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, reinforces this Christian presumption. St. Peter, who after the Ascension clearly assumed the role of being head of the Apostles and of the Church, has entered the house of Cornelius. This is a critically important detail. Cornelius was a Roman! His name was Roman. He was a pagan. He at least supported, and likely abetted, the cruel Roman occupation. He was part of the system that had crucified Jesus in the effort to replace God with the Roman emperor, a mere human being, and a despicable, immoral human at that. Yet to Cornelius, Peter came with the saving power of Christ, because “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). Finally, St. Luke’s Gospel describes the event of the baptism itself. It occurred in the River Jordan, in itself symbolic of life. The Jordan can then, as it runs now, as a precious bearer of water in an arid, desperately dry land.

Jesus adds his unworthiness even to loosen the straps of Christ’s sandals, but Jesus tells him to proceed. Innocent, holy and without blemish, Jesus steps into the place of sinful humanity. It is no impetuous move, disconnected from divine love, from divine mercy and from God’s plan to save us all from the effects of sin.

From the sky, an old symbol of God’s almighty, overseeing power, God the Father speaks, identifying Jesus as his beloved Son.

Reflection

The meaning of Peter’s entrance into the home of the pagan Cornelius and of Peter’s reception of Cornelius into the Church cannot be understated. We can be sure of this point. Faithful Jews who at the time witnessed this extraordinary act of Peter talked about it until they died! It was revolutionary.

It reminds us that the love of God stops at no border. No one is preferred. God loves all. It reminds us that salvation comes only in Christ. It reminds us that Peter represents Christ.

This feast is a study in mercy. God is merciful in dealing with us. By divine mercy in Christ, our sins are washed away. We are saved.

We, too, must show mercy, as Peter extended mercy to Cornelius, the Roman, a representative of the people that had crucified Christ and scorned his kingship. †

Daily Readings

Monday, January 11
1 Samuel 11:1-8
Psalm 116:12-19
Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday, January 12
1 Samuel 1:9-20
(Response) 1 Samuel 2:1-4, 8-9
Mark 1:21-28

Wednesday, January 13
St. Hilary, bishop and doctor of the Church
1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20
Psalm 40:2, 5, 7-10
Mark 1:29-39

Thursday, January 14
1 Samuel 4:1-11
Psalm 44-10-11, 14-15, 24-25
Mark 1:40-45

Question Corner

Fr. Kenneth Doyle

Holy days of obligation determined by national bishops’ conferences

Q: I am confused as to why there is an obligation to attend Mass on certain holy days in some years, but not in others. This seems to send a mixed message as to the importance of the feasts. Also, for the past two years, there has been only one Mass offered in my parish on Jan. 1, which is usually a holy day of obligation.

A: Each national conference of bishops has the prerogative of determining the holy days of obligation for their country. In 1991, the bishops of the U.S. decided that whenever the solemnities are celebrated on Jan. 1, Aug. 15 and Nov. 1 take place on a Saturday or a Monday, the obligation to attend Mass is lifted. But on two holy days, American Catholics are obliged to go to a feast day Mass no matter on what day they occur—Christmas and the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The latter feast is celebrated on Dec. 9, and is the patronal feast of many of our nation’s parishes.

Does this mean that the bishops considered these two days to be “more important” than the other holy days? That seems a logical conclusion, but it remains true that the other holy days were still important enough in the mind of the bishops to require attendance at Mass when they are celebrated on most days of the week.

As to your concern about your parish offering only one Mass on Jan. 1 even when it has been a holy day of obligation, I agree with you. I don’t think it’s an acknowledgement that this particular feast is not important, but it may be a concession that Mass on this date is not nearly as well attended as it ought to be—and pedagogically. I don’t think it’s good to cater to people’s delinquency.

I would think it better, if priests are available, to have at least two feast day Masses—perhaps a vigil early in the evening on Dec. 31 and then a morning Mass on Jan. 1, to make it more convenient for people to fulfill their obligation and start the new year off right by seeking the Blessing of the Lord.

On the parish level, the pastor has the ultimate responsibility for the orthodoxy and propriety of what is said from the pulpit. To answer your question directly: A deacon does not have “sole independence” for his remarks. In practice, though, rarely does this result in the pastor’s “pre-screening” a deacon’s homilies. By the very fact that he has allowed and invited the deacon to preach, the pastor has indicated his confidence that the deacon will handle things maturely and well. Deacons do not pop up suddenly from a congregation on a Sunday morning.

Before being ordained, deacons undergo a fairly intensive formation process that includes several years of theological education, psychological evaluation and tutoring in pastoral techniques. Returning to your question, you would be best advised to bring your concern to your pastor. If he, like you, is “stunned” by what the deacon is said to have said, he will surely bring it to the deacon’s attention to avoid future problems. If he deems it necessary, the pastor might even see fit to make a correction from the pulpit.

Readers may submit prose or poetry for faith column

The Criterion invites readers to submit untrammelled prose or poetry relating to faith or experiences of prayer for possible publication in the My Journey to God column.

Seasonal reflections also are appreciated. Please include name, address, parish and telephone number when submitting material.

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Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in The Criterion, Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have resolutions elsewhere: if so, those are separate obituaries on this page. 


ALVEY, Charles W., Sr., 86. St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County, Dec. 15. Husband of Karen McMaster and Bill Backherms.


SAVAGE, Beverly (Garavaglia), 84, Christ the King, Indianapolis, Dec. 5. Mother of Laura Kazemi, Art and Mark Garavaglia. Grandmother of six.


WINFREY, Nellie V., 72, Holy Angels, Indianapolis, Dec. 7. Mother of Michelle Brown and Merri Dady.

Federal judge says state can cut contract with Planned Parenthood

We Three Kings

Young man dressed as the Three Kings present the gifts during a Spanish-language Mass on the feast of the Epiphany on Jan. 3 at St. John of God Church in Central Islip, N.Y. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shaver)

“We Three Kings (CNS)—A federal judge said the state of Utah can end its contract with Planned Parenthood, which is paid for with federal funds. The U.S. District Judge Clark Waddoups issued the order on Dec. 22. In October, he had blocked an effort by Utah Gov. Gary Herbert to defund the Utah affiliate of Planned Parenthood. Herbert had issued an August order in August to cut the funding based on secretly recorded videos released earlier in the year by a California organization, the Center for Medical Progress, which describe Planned Parenthood leaders as selling fetal tissue from abortions for research purposes.

“Joseph Walsh. Grandmother of eleven.

VANNY, Margaret A., 72, St. Jude, Indianapolis, Dec. 10. Mother of Kathy Halter, Teri Ward, Kevin, Rick and Steve Vanny. Sisters of Mary Kay Gill and Howard N. Vanny.

WHEELAN, Dennis M., 74, 16th St., Indianapolis, Dec. 15. Husband of Sharon Whelan. Father of Teri Alderson, Tina Whelan and Tammy Woltersen. Great-grandfather of seven.

WINFREY, Nellie V., 72, Holy Angels, Indianapolis, Dec. 7. Mother of Michelle Brown and Merri Dady.
A historic agreement signed between the Holy See and the Palestinian Authority, the Vatican has signed an agreement that goes into effect. The agreement, consisting of a preamble and 32 articles, regards essential aspects of the life and activity of the Catholic Church in Palestine. It assures the Church “judicial recognition,” and “guarantees” for its work and institutions in the region. The Comprehensive Agreement follows up on the Basic Agreement, signed in 2000, between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and was the result of years-long bilateral negotiations.

Videos of pope's prayer intentions will hit social media

The path to holiness, Leah says, requires time management: “We need to think about the time God has given us, and we need to use it well.”

A Vatican agreement with Palestine goes into effect

For more information, please log on to www.archindy.org/layministry
Canada on track to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees, says ambassador

AMMAN, Jordan (CNS)—Canada is on track to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees, says the Canadian ambassador to Jordan, Mark Martin.

The Canadian target of accepting 25,000 Syrian refugees by late February “is well in hand, and we should meet it with no problem,” Bruno Saccomani, Canadian ambassador to Jordan, told Catholic News Service (CNS) on Dec. 30. “That includes privately sponsored and government-sponsored Syrian refugees.”

Martin, who directs the Office for Refugees in the Archdiocese of Toronto, told CNS in early January, “Even in the night, we received new people and also new notices from Amman, the Jordanian capital, that we will be getting around 300 people.”

Canada has one of the biggest resettlement programs in the world for Syrian refugees, and the Toronto archdiocesan office, known as ORAT, provides advice, support and assistance to civic sponsors in Canada, including parishes, communities and other groups wishing to aid refugees.

“Consider it as an emergency operation because of the large number of people coming and the last-minute arrangements,” Mark told CNS. “The refugees were on route for one or two days and with the excitement, everyone was really tired when they arrived.”

Mark was a refugee from Hungary 15 years ago, and said he personally understands the difficulties faced by those escaping conflict and discrimination. The former veterinarian was forced to flee factions in his native Hungary who resented his work on behalf of victims of racism.

Mark said ORAT focuses mainly on privately sponsored refugees. “Only if there is a special need, the government asks us to help with government-sponsored refugees under the joint-assistance sponsorship program,” he said. “This is mainly for refugees who face severe medical needs.”

“We identify our refugees, select and screen them, do all the preparations and pay the bill,” Mark said of ORAT’s private sponsorship. “So we are financially responsible for each and every refugee that we bring into the country.”

Mark said that in 2015, ORAT initiated sponsorship and resettlement for 2,300 refugees worldwide. Ninety percent, mainly Iraqis and Syrians, came from the Middle East.

Saccomani said increased numbers of Canadian government personnel on the ground in the Middle East have permitted the processing of refugees to go faster to reach the February goal, without sacrificing stringent security measures.

He said immigration, security, medical and military services have been mobilized for the effort in which “normal vetting processes have been organized.”

Often, Iraqi Christians who fled the Islamic State takeover of their land in Toronto or Montreal, “We are selecting from Syria representing the largest humanitarian need on the world at the moment.”

Currently, Syrian refugees are being processed in the Middle East, and Mark said the processing of refugees has included Project Hope, a special appeal to help refugees from the Middle East.

Mark said the program helps everybody from the Middle East, not only Syrian citizens, but Iraqis. And we have some cases of Sudanese in Jordan. We include them also to help because we feel that we cannot send them away, just because they carry a different passport.

Often, Iraqi Christians who fled the Islamic State takeover of their property in the Nineveh Plain in 2014 have been overlooked by the West’s resettlement efforts of Syrians.

“We are very inclusive, but we want to make sure that the persecuted Christians have a significant place. We should never abandon them among other refugees,” Mark added. “We try to make sure that it is a balanced selection of persecuted Christians and other minorities who need help.”

Jordan hosts some 630,000 registered Syrian refugees, but the government says when unregistered refugees are included, the figure is much higher. Jordan has praised Canada’s resettlement program and called on other countries to follow suit, particularly those urging Syrian country’s neighbors to host even more refugees.

Saccomani said it would be impossible to carry out such a comprehensive refugee resettlement program without backing from the Canadian public. “This would never be able to work had we not received the complete support of the Canadian public.”

After the Syrians land in Toronto or Montreal,” the diplomat added, “they will be received in over 40 communities across the country.”

“Thât’s the real secret of this operation. Canadians as a whole have embraced this project as a national Canadian one, and we are all very, very proud to be part of it,” the ambassador added.

Mark described Canadian reaction as wonderful. “This is faith in practice,” he added. “You can see different groups, some with no personal interests getting involved, just because everybody understands that we need to do something.”