Pacers star soars through life with a joy and passion that drives his game, his faith

By John Shaughnessy

Victor Oladipo can ignite a basketball crowd with his passion—an intensity that has already made him a fan favorite in his first year of playing for the Indiana Pacers.

The 25-year-old only son of two Nigerian immigrants is also known for a relentless work ethic that has powered him to become an All-Star in the National Basketball Association (NBA) for the first time this year.

Yet if you want to see the toughness and intensity dissolve from the face of the former Indiana University All-American, just mention his love of singing, including the times when he and his mother served as cantors in the Catholic church their family attended when he was growing up.

His eyes glow with joy, and a quick smile bursts across his face as he remembers those days.

That softness continues as he talks about his relationship with God, the importance of his Catholic faith in his life, and his admiration for his sister who became deaf after an illness when she was 6.

It’s also evident when he recalls the most memorable part of his first All-Star game experience—having his father, who has rarely seen him play in high school, college and the pros, be there to watch him in that crowning moment.

Oladipo talked about all those topics during a recent interview with The Criterion.

Q. Overall, how would you describe your relationship with God and the place he has in your life?

A. “I think I have a close relationship with God. I think a lot of people know that, and a lot of people who know me know that my faith means a lot to me. He knows I’m not perfect—no man is—but he knows at the end of the day that I love him as much as he loves me. Well, he probably loves me way more than I even love myself.

“It’s just an amazing feeling because he’s blessed me abundantly. I appreciate it, and I continue to try to treat others the way I want to be treated. And love my enemies and everything that he tells me to do. I try to live out my life as a God-fearing man, and let everybody know that God is the...
Easter shows the power of love, which renews the world, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Easter makes it clear that in the life of Jesus, but also in the lives of modern men and women, “death, solitude and fear” do not have the last word, Pope Francis said before giving his Easter blessing.

“The words heard by the women at the tomb are also addressed to us,” he said. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (Lk 24:5-6), the pope said as he prepared on April 1 to give his Easter blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city and the world).

“By the power of God’s love,” Jesus’ victory over death “dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen and joy to penitents, ruins the work of the enemy, humbles itself and gives itself to the very people it is put into the ground.”

“This is precisely what happened: Jesus, the grain of wheat which was sown into the ground, the power of that love which brings forth new life rises again after death continues today and can bring peace to the world’s most serious situations of conflict, including in Syria, the Holy Land, Yemen, Congo, South Sudan, Ukraine, the Korean peninsula and Venezuela.”

“Christians believe and know that Christ’s resurrection is the true hope of the world, the hope that does not disappoint,” the pope said. “It is the power of the grain of wheat, the power of that love which humbles itself and gives itself to the very end, and thus truly renewes the world.”

Pope Francis gives a brief homily during the Mass, speaking without a prepared text about how God’s actions throughout history to save his people have been acts that surprised them, touched their hearts and promised them to rush to share the news with others.

“The women who had gone to anoint the Lord’s body found themselves before a surprise” when they reached the empty tomb, he said. “God’s announcements are always a surprise, because our God is a God of surprises.”

That surprise caused the women to rush to other disciples to share the news, he said, just like the shepherds rushed when they heard the angels announce Jesus’ birth and like Peter and John ran to tell others when they found the teacher and master they had been seeking.

“Those people left what they were doing; housewives left their potatoes in the pan—they would find them burnt later—but what is important is to go, run to see the surprise” that was announced, Pope Francis said.

On Easter, he said, Christians should ask themselves if they have hearts open to being surprised by God and if they feel a need to rush to share with others the good news of God’s saving acts.

After the Mass and after greeting each of the cardinals and many of the bishops and monsignors present near the altar, Pope Francis climbed into the popemobile for a quick trip around St. Peter’s Square and part of the way down the main boulevard leading to the square. He then went up to the balcony to give his formal Easter blessing.

In his remarks to the tens of thousands of people in St. Peter’s Square, Pope Francis insisted Jesus’ power over death continues today and can bring peace to the world’s most serious situations of conflict, including in Syria, the Holy Land, Yemen, Congo, South Sudan, Ukraine, the Korean peninsula and Venezuela.

“We Christians believe and know that Christ’s resurrection is the true hope of the world, the hope that does not disappoint,” the pope said. “It is the power of the grain of wheat, the power of that love which humbles itself and gives itself to the very end, and thus truly renewes the world.”

NCEA honors Elcesser for work in promoting school choice

John Elcesser greeted the news of his national award with humor and humility.

“I thought I got the e-mail by mistake,” Elcesser said about the honor from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). “I felt out of the blue.”

Citing his “outstanding leadership” in promoting school choice opportunities for children in Indiana, the NCEA has honored him with one of its prestigious President’s Awards.

Elcesser, the executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA), received the Leonard F. DeFiore Parental Choice Advocate Award on April 12 during the NCEA’s national convention in Cincinnati.

“This award honors a person or organization that has demonstrated outstanding leadership in promoting full and fair parental choice in education,” noted the NCEA press release. “The right to choose the schools they believe best serve their children is a rallying cry for parents of modest means who, he argues, have a legitimate claim to public support.

“In Indiana, John was a leader in the coalition that successfully passed tax-credit scholarship and voucher legislation.”

In accepting the award, Elcesser said he did so “on behalf of all the people in Indiana who worked hard to make school choice happen.”

“I’ve never believed that school choice isn’t just because of one individual or a small group of people,” said Elcesser, a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis. “It’s a movement. A lot of people in Indiana have been involved in the success of school choice.

“The people who had to work hard are the superintendent, the principals and the teachers who embraced all of these new students and brought them into our schools. They’re the real unsung heroes in Indiana.

In his 10th year as executive director of INPEA, Elcesser leads the organization that represents more than 400 non-public schools in Indiana, 96,000 students and 7,700 teachers. The organization exists to serve the interests of non-public schools in Indiana, including faith-based and independent schools.

Elcesser said he’s proud to represent the school families and the children who choose them. He’s also pleased to be part of the school choice effort that makes those schools financially available for many families.

“I’ve been blessed to be a small part of this movement. It’s enabled families and kids to choose the best fit for them, no matter where they live or what their financial ability is.”

NCEA honors Elcesser for work in promoting school choice

April 7 — 10 a.m. CT

Transitional diaconate ordination at Archabbey Church, Our Lady of Einsiedeln, St. Meinrad

April 8 — 10:30 a.m.

Disability Awareness Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

April 8 — 5:30 p.m.

Confirmation in Extraordinary Form for youths of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish at Holy Rosary Church, Indianapolis

April 10 — 7 p.m.

Confirmation of youths of Good Shepherd Parish and St. John the Evangelist, Indianapolis, and St. Michael Parish, Greenfield, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

April 12 — 8 a.m.

Judiciaries Meeting, Indiana Interchurch Center, Indianapolis

April 14 — 11 a.m.

Confirmation of youths of St. Bartholomew Parish, Columbus, and Prince of Peace Parish, Madison, at St. Bartholomew Church, Indianapolis

April 15 — 2 p.m.

Confirmation of youths from Annunciation Parish and St. Joseph Parish, Rockville, St. Mary-of-the-Woods Parish, St. Mary-of-the-Woods; and the Terre Haute parishes of St. Benedict, Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Joseph University, St. Margaret Mary and St. Patrick, at St. Benedict Church

April 16 — 8 a.m.

Indiana Bishops and Major Superiors Meeting, Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House

April 17 — 11 a.m.

Archdiocesan Priests’ Workshop at St. Joseph Church, Jennings County

April 17 — 7 p.m.

Confirmation of youths of Holy Spirit Parish, Indianapolis, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

April 18 — 7 p.m.

Confirmation of youths of Christ the King and Immaculate Heart of Mary parishes, Indianapolis, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

(Schedule subject to change.)
Priests renew promises, oils blessed during annual chrism Mass

By Sean Gallagher

The archdiocese in microcosm. That was the annual archdiocesan chrism Mass celebrated on Tuesday of Holy Week, March 27, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis.

Lay faithful, young and old, from parishes across central and southern Indiana, men and women in consecrated life from religious communities across the archdiocese, deacons and some 140 priests gathered for worship with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson in his first chrism Mass as shepherd of the archdiocese.

The liturgy embodying the faithful of the archdiocese furthered the worship that will take place across central and southern Indiana during the coming year.

Archbishop Thompson blessed oils that will be used in the celebration of baptism, confirmation, holy orders and the anointing of the sick and in the dedications of altars and churches. They were received by representatives of archdiocesan parishes. Priests serving across the archdiocese also renewed the promises they made at their ordination.

In his homily during the liturgy, Archbishop Thompson recalled his pastoral letter, “We Are One in Christ,” which he issued on Feb. 14 at the start of Lent, noting how he examined many threats to human dignity, including abortion, the difficult circumstances of immigrants, racism, various forms of drug abuse, gun violence and dangers to religious liberty.

He noted that, by bringing up these issues, he did not want to bring “a dark cloud” over Holy Week, but instead sought to highlight “our need for the message of hope” found in the liturgy’s Scripture readings from Isaiah, Revelation and the Gospel of Luke.

Quoting from the first reading from Isaiah, Archbishop Thompson pointed to the hope found in the “lasting covenant” God has established with us in and through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (that) these are holy oils of gladness.

“In him, through the administering of the holy oils, we are anointed as priests, prophets and kings in the sight of God,” he continued. “The dignity bestowed upon us as sons and daughters of God is unlike anything the world can offer or take away.”

In concluding his homily, Archbishop Thompson acknowledged the reality that “we have challenges before us, both individually and societally.”

Nevertheless, he recalled that “here we celebrate the Spirit of the Lord continuing to fulfill even in our hearing today the promise of salvation.”

In the upcoming solemn remembrance of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection that would be celebrated on Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, Archbishop Thompson said that the faithful are once again reminded that “we are claimed by Jesus Christ and given to share in his saving mission that involves both the cross and empty tomb, a crown of thorns and a crown of glory.”

“Despise even ourselves, sinners each and every one of us, we are blessed indeed,” he said. “Embracing the call to missionary discipleship, armed with both word and sacrament, may we go forth, making a difference in service to God and the faithful.”

The archdiocese furthered the worship that would be celebrated on Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, Archbishop Thompson said that the faithful are once again reminded that “we are claimed by Jesus Christ and given to share in his saving mission that involves both the cross and empty tomb, a crown of thorns and a crown of glory. “Despite even ourselves, sinners each and every one of us, we are blessed indeed,” he said. “Embracing the call to missionary discipleship, armed with both word and sacrament, may we go forth, making a difference in service to God and the faithful.”

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“Despise even ourselves, sinners each and every one of us, we are blessed indeed,” he said. “Embracing the call to missionary discipleship, armed with both word and sacrament, may we go forth, making a difference in service to God and the faithful.”
Pope Francis kisses Peter Lombardi, 12, of Columbus, Ohio, after the boy rode in the popemobile during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on March 28. Receiving a kiss from the pope was a wish come true for Peter, who has Down syndrome and has survived leukemia. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

While there continues to be chaos in various hot spots on the map, seemingly endless violence in other places, and a lack of respect and love for many of our brothers and sisters around the globe, leave it to Pope Francis to show us an instrument of God’s love is still very much a part of our fractured world.

And we believe it is no coincidence that the Holy Father’s actions occurred during Holy Week. While taking part in his weekly general audience on March 28, the pope granted a 12-year-old American’s wish and then some.

Peter Lombardi of Columbus, Ohio, who has Down syndrome, and whose family had been hoping to see Pope Francis in 2015 during the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. However, those dreams were dashed when the boy became ill with leukemia. While receiving chemotherapy treatment, Peter was watching the papal visit from his hospital room with his family when representations from the Make-A-Wish Foundation arrived.

His mother Brenda said the representative asked, “So Peter, what is your make-a-wish?” And Peter said, “I want to be kissed by that man who is kissing all those children on TV.” Brenda Lombardi told Catholic News Service (CNS). “(Though they couldn’t grant that wish, Make-A-Wish Foundation officials said they would be able to grant Peter’s second wish, a lighthouse duel with Darth Vader at Disneyland, in 2019.)

After Peter was cured from leukemia last June, the Lombardi family decided to embark on a pilgrimage to Rome. Assisi and Medjugorje to thank God for Peter’s healing. They arrived in Rome on Palm Sunday.

They hired a guide, Mountain Butorac, who works for a Catholic travel agency, to give them a tour of Rome. Butora was also able to arrange for the family to stand in the front row during the pope’s general audience in St. Peter’s Square to possibly make Peter’s dream come true: “We never thought it would come to fruition. You can’t come to Rome and expect Pope Francis to kiss your child among the millions of people,” Brenda Lombardi told the Cable News Network (CNN) via telephone from Rome.

But Peter’s wish didn’t end there. After a security guard lifted Peter over the railing of the popemobile so he could get a kiss from the pope, the Holy Father told his security detail to give the boy a seat behind him and, together, they circled the square.

As her son waved back and smiled, Brenda Lombardi cried. “He was gone for like 20 minutes riding with the pope, and the pope kissed him and blessed him,” Brenda Lombardi said.

While riding in the popemobile with the boy, Pope Francis was given a balloon shaped into a crown. Peter said he made one more request in the popemobile.

“I said, ‘Thank you, pope, give me a balloon,’” Peter told CNS. The pope immediately placed the balloon crown on Peter’s head.

Faith has been at the heart of the Lombardis’ journey, and they credit God for helping Peter overcome cancer, as well as guiding him through other tough times.

“I thanked [God] for always surpassing our expectations when it comes to our faith and our trust in him,” Brenda Lombardi told CNN. “You think that when your child gets leukemia, it is a heavy cross and a battle, but through the experience, it was just full of grace. God just kept giving us so much hope.”

The significance of Pope Francis’ gesture wasn’t just a dream come true for Peter and his family, but a sign that God had bigger and better plans in store for them.

“That’s how God works, right? We weren’t supposed to see Pope Francis in Philly, we were supposed to see him in the square, and Peter was supposed to ride in the popemobile with him,” Brenda Lombardi told CNS. “You can’t make this stuff up. So, we thank the Lord for his graces and his mercy.”

The Lombardis’ experience offers more evidence that, with God, all things are possible.

Mike Krokos

Be Our Guest/Rob Murray

Colton Murray: A case for life

My wife Vickie and I lost our grandson Colton Murray in mid-December of 2017, just 13 days short of his second birthday. Some from our home church, St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute, knew from the onset that he was our grandson. Others came to know him, having followed Colton on Facebook and later discovering that connection.

He succumbed to a multitude of serious medical issues, one of which stemmed from Down syndrome, and to multiple genetic defects that left him with bad heart and a heart that only worked on one side.

As I prepared Colton’s funeral oration in December, there were several threads of thought that ran through my mind that demanded a voice, but there was one in particular that began to be shared. It began with the question: What if there had been no Colton?

Much in the same vein as the movie It’s a Wonderful Life, we can take a clear, measurable look at what difference Colton’s existence made in the world. This little boy, through the agency of his parents, accomplished more in two years than many have accomplished in a lifetime.

His résumé is impressive. It included being chosen to be an ambassador for the National Down Syndrome Society, and he appeared in their annual Times Square video in 2017. Colton also started a in 3-20 spot for Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, where he spent a good deal of his life. There were also a number of media outlets across the United States who kept audiences apprised of Colton’s progress.

Colton also rewrote the book on certain approaches to medical care as he presented new challenges to the doctors and nurses who cared for him. As one doctor put it: “We would always start with the book, and then let Colton rewrite it for us.”

In addition, he enjoyed a huge virtual gathering of well-wishers who cheered the little boy on and collectively came to prayer on a regular basis. At last count, there were over 28,000 people who had been following Colton’s story on Facebook.

Here is a Facebook post from one of Colton’s followers named Penny. She wrote: “It’s been a pleasure and a blessing having Colton in our lives, even though we have never met. To be able to share in on his joy, his blessings and prayers through the hard times. My twins will be 6 on Saturday, but have come so far in their prayer life and learning to care for someone so far away. Thanks to you and your family for helping to mold my children. Colton will forever be in our hearts.”

It is very clear to me that God’s hand was on little boy, Colton, without uttering the first word, preached the perfect sermon and brought tens of thousands into his little church to pray.

God is the “tender care that nothing wrong with a human being, that selfsame human being by its very nature possesses an inconceivable worth because he or she is made in the image of God.

All human life from conception to natural death deserves the honor bestowed upon it by our Creator. We can offer nothing less than our best as we adore God and reverence his creatures.

Lastly, let me say that Vickie and I are beyond grateful for the many kindnesses, the prayers and well wishes, the gifts and most especially the love that has poured out from the hearts of people toward Colton and his family.

We received the kind of unmerited, undeserved love that so vividly reflects the Lord’s love for each of us. It is also a humbling experience, because the love flows freely, and it washes over a person who receives it without any sense of control.

It was our place to simply accept it without repayment and back in the love of Christ that shown on our family like a warm winter sun. To say, “Thank you,” doesn’t even begin to express our gratitude.

(Rob Murray is a pastoral associate at St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute.)

Letter to the Editor

Elders inspire faith, Criterion reader says

I loved the article on Mary Weir in the March 23 issue of The Criterion. I actually know one of her granddaughters and love to hear stories about Mary. She’s an amazing woman at 109, and her faith is inspiring.

It got me thinking of all the other strong Catholics in my life who have shaped me. (One is) Agnes Hopkins, who is going to be 95 and lives at the St. Augustine (Home for the Aged in Indianapolis). She is my grandfather from a previous marriage, but her story of moving here from England is captivating. She is a devout Catholic, and I always joke with her, calling her “Mother Teresa.”

God and her faith have gotten her through some treacherous times. She was bombed out of her house in Liverpool, England, as a young girl. She was an Army bride to a U.S. man and came over to the United States by boat with her 1-year-old son to meet a family she never knew. She lost a child three days after childbirth, and her son in his 20s. Her faith never faltered! I am always inspired by her love of the Catholic faith.

Stormie Hopkins

Indianapolis

Colton Murray

Colton. God wanted nothing.

So the question presents itself again: What would have happened if Colton’s parents had chosen to abort him because they knew that he had defects? And what would have happened if those parents had chosen not to bring Colton into the world because it would have significantly and inconveniently disrupted their lives?

In this case, we can see and measure the results. We can know the answer to this question. Because of the love of Mom and Dad and their unwavering commitment and care for this little boy, plenty happened.

This little life was filled with a richness and long-reaching effect that no one could have predicted, but was made possible because two people said “yes” to Colton and to God.

Being pro-life is not a political stance. It is not a movement. And it most certainly is not the irrational claims of raving religious lunatics. Rather, it is the deliberate and reverential acknowledgment that even in this fallen world where much can go wrong with a human being, that selfsame human being by its very nature possesses an inconceivable worth because he or she is made in the image of God.

All human life from conception to natural death deserves the honor bestowed upon it by our Creator. We can offer nothing less than our best as we adore God and reverence his creatures.

Lastly, let me say that Vickie and I are beyond grateful for the many kindnesses, the prayers and well wishes, the gifts and most especially the love that has poured out from the hearts of people toward Colton and his family.

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(Rob Murray is a pastoral associate at St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute.)
**El amor y la misericordia son los frutos de la alegría de la Pascua**

"El amor es el atributo esencial de Dios puesto que, como dice el Apóstol Pablo, "el amor es la verdadera misericordia." (Bishop Robert E. Barron)"
April 10
St. Paul Catholic Center, 1413 E. 17th St., Bloomington: 6th Annual Pro-Life Charlotte Breakfast. kindergarten breakfast, presentation. 7:30 a.m., free. Information: 812-357-6545 or mjmurphy@archindy.org.

April 11
St. Paul Catholic Center, 1413 E. 17th St., Bloomington: 6th Annual pro-Life Charlotte Breakfast. kindergarten breakfast, presentation. 7:30 a.m., free. Information: 812-357-6545 or mjmurphy@archindy.org.

April 12
7:30 p.m. Maryott, 10 S. West St., Indianapolis: Celebration of Life Banquet. to host keynote speaker, Benistie Life. Information and registration: www.loveforlifeindy.com.

April 13

April 14
Holy Name of Jesus Parish, 21 N. 6th St., Beech Grove: Archbishop Edward T. Cardinal Burke, jburianek@ss-fc.org.

April 15
St. Vincent de Paul Parish, 8215 Michigan Road, Indianapolis: Knights of Columbus Chicken Noodle Dinner. chicken and noodles, mashed potatoes, green beans, dessert and drink. 3:30-6:30 p.m., $8 adults, $6 children 6-12 and under. free registration: 317-985-4028.


April 17
St. John Paul II Parish, St. Paul Campus, 216 Scheller Ave., Sellersburg: "You Are Witnesses to These Things: Becoming People of Purpose." David Wells presenting, 6:30-9 p.m. each evening. Information: 812-246-3522, 302-867-8575.

April 18

April 19
St. Joseph Parish, 1401 S. Miami Ave., Indianapolis: Fatima Retreat, 7:30 a.m., buffet breakfast and lunch. for the day and lunch, spiritual direction available. registration: 317-788-7581. information: www.archindy.org/fatima

April 20

April 21
7:30 a.m., buffet breakfast and lunch. for the day and lunch, spiritual direction available. registration: 317-788-7581, www.archindy.org/fatima

April 22

May 1

May 4

May 11
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

April 23
St. Michael Parish, 11400 Fountain St., NE, Indianapolis: Countryfest Dinner and dance. Canceled by RNG, live music by Jamboree Crossing. 5-11 p.m., $25 advance tickets only. must be 21. Information: 812-364-6559, frank halluc@gmail.com.

May 1

April 24
St. Michael Parish, 11400 Fountain St., NE, Indianapolis: Women’s Day: The Woman of the St. Augustine Guild luncheon, jewelry, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., $50 per person. Information: 317-888-1892 or carolynlevine@archindy.org.

April 25
St. Meinrad Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis: Our Lady of Fatima Retreat, 7-8:30 p.m. Information: 317-784-4419 or www.catholiccemeteries.com.

May 11

May 18
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

April 26

April 27

April 28
St. Michael Parish, 11400 Fountain St., NE, Indianapolis: Countryfest Dinner and dance. Canceled by RNG, live music by Jamboree Crossing. 5-11 p.m., $25 advance tickets only. must be 21. Information: 812-364-6559, frank halluc@gmail.com.

May 18
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

April 29
St. Joseph Parish, 1401 S. Miami Ave., Indianapolis: Fatima Retreat, 7:30 a.m., buffet breakfast and lunch. for the day and lunch, spiritual direction available. registration: 317-788-7581. information: www.archindy.org/fatima

April 30

May 1

May 8

May 15
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May 22

May 29
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June 5
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

June 12
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June 19
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June 26
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July 3
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

July 10
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July 17
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.

July 24
The Archium, 3343 E. Thompson Road, Indianapolis: Gabriel Project Fundraising Dinner. Project Gabriel Project of communicators. David Banks, Mr. 630-9 p.m., 520. Register by April 15 at archindy.org.
Elizabeth Punt, a counselor at the Women’s Care Center in Bloomington, shows the center’s ultrasound machine to Ted Costo, a member of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington.

By Katie Rutter

Special to The Criterion

BLOOMINGTON—The Women’s Care Center opened for business on a main Bloomington thoroughfare just over one year ago, yet the stream of community members crossing the threshold has already surpassed expectations.

Since Feb. 1, 2017, the quaint red brick building with a bright pink awning has received more than 1,300 visits.

“It’s been wonderful,” said Lee Ann Zatkulak, the director of the Women’s Care Center and a member of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. “I would say at that point, we serve probably close to eight to 10 women a day.”

These women come through the white-trimmed glass door for pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, counseling and parenting classes, all provided for free. Expectant mothers also earn coupons for each visit that can be used at the Women’s Care Center to “purchase” brand new items, like clothing and cribs, for their babies.

By providing these free services, the Women’s Care Center aims to give pregnant women the support and resources they need to have their babies, especially women who might be considering abortion.

“The initial thing that women typically come in for is a free pregnancy test,” Zatkulak explained. “In that session, we talk to them about what they’re thinking with the pregnancy and what options are on the table.”

The staff, three women strong, handles most of the day-to-day client needs. On March 7, however, nearly 50 behind-the-scenes volunteers, supporters and donors gathered at the Women’s Care Center to celebrate the facility’s success and dedicate the space.

Invited by these supporters and staff, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson was present to lead a prayer service and bless the building.

“It’s really important for us that we have this access to the community,” Zatkulak said, “to make the Catholic community as a whole, said Zatkulak. Attendees crowded in the front waiting room that spilled into the main hallway of the center. Archbishop Thompson led several prayers, and Bible passages were read aloud.

During the service, the popularity of the Women’s Care Center became even more apparent. As counselor Elizabeth Punt read petitions that asked for God’s blessing on the center and those who might visit it, a young couple walked into the crowded building to request a pregnancy test.

“That’s something that the community receives as accessible to our center is that they can just pop in if they want to. Punt explained with a smile after the dedication. “The staff, three women strong, handles most of the day-to-day client needs. On March 7, however, nearly 50 behind-the-scenes volunteers, supporters and donors gathered at the Women’s Care Center to celebrate the facility’s success and dedicate the space.”

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“That’s something that the community receives as accessible to our center is that they can just pop in if they want to,” Punt explained with a smile after the dedication. “The sign on the front of the building declares this fact in bold letters: Walk-Ins Welcome.”

Gracie Williams, a trained counselor from a Women’s Care Center location in South Bend, Ind., jumped into her official role, quickly taking the surprised couple outside and assuring them that they were in the right location. Punt joined the group as soon as she had finished the petitions. Together, the women scheduled the couple’s visit for later that afternoon.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Thompson added one last petition.

“For that young couple, whatever their needs are, we pray to the Lord,” Archbishop Thompson said.

Those gathered responded with a wholehearted, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Archbishop Thompson concluded the dedication and blessed each room with holy water, including the ultrasound and counseling rooms. He later commented on the decor of the spaces, all of which were painted a calming beige accented with warm browns, oranges and reds, and filled with comfortable furniture.

“They intentionally try to make a place that feels like home so all the families that come here feel a warm place, a loving place, a welcoming place, a caring place,” Archbishop Thompson said. “[but] it’s not only the walls and the facility, but the people that are in it.”

The new Bloomington facility is part of the largest network of pregnancy resource centers in the country. Nationally, Women’s Care Center operates 29 centers, including one in Indianapolis, in 10 states. Headquartered in South Bend, Ind., the network serves about 26,000 women each year.

“They know they’re going to be treated with unconditional love, incredible respect, no judgment and years of ongoing support,” said Bobby Williams, the director of the Women’s Care Center Foundation and a member of St. Anthony de Padua Parish in South Bend, Ind., in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

“For more than nine out of 10 of our clients ultimately choose life for their babies, either to parent it or to place for adoption,” he added.

As of March 7, the Women’s Care Center in Bloomington had 185 expectant mothers currently receiving their services and counted 266 babies born to clients. Zatkulak recalled many obstacles that these mothers had to overcome, and retold the story of a woman who had given birth to a child in December. The woman was in her late 30s and visited the Women’s Care Center when she was only a few weeks pregnant.

“She was wavering. She definitely had people telling her that abortion was best because of instability in her own life. Her housing was not stable. She had a job, but she had medical disabilities that were potentially going to have her lose her job,” Zatkulak shared.

The staff met with the woman regularly and provided parenting classes and free items for her baby. They even coached the mother after an early delivery while her premature little girl was in a neonatal intensive care unit.

“We saw her blossom into just a wonderful mom who’s now got stable housing; whose family, I think, is surprised by the love that she has to give this baby and all that she’s been able to accomplish,” Zatkulak related.

Located less than a mile from the campus of Indiana University, the staff says that they serve college students on a regular basis. Punt explained that, in counseling sessions, she has the opportunity to help these young women learn how to parent a child while still achieving their goal of higher education.

“That’s just the blessing and the reward that I get when I’m in the room with these women,” said Punt. “I see [them] realize that, ‘My life is not over, it’s not baby pitted against this other goal that I have, but I can do both.’”

The new Women’s Care Center is located right next to the Bloomington Planned Parenthood facility, which is the only place that provides chemical and medical abortions in southern Indiana. According to the Indiana Induced Termination of Pregnancy Report, the clinic performed 1,016 abortions in the year 2016, which represents the latest statistics available.

“This is where the women are, so we just want to make sure that women can find us, and they know there are other choices, and there are other options,” explained Williams.

As the Women’s Care Center was blessed and dedicated, a separate effort to provide abortion “one soul at a time.”

The most recent campaign began on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14, and ended on March 25.

During the campaign, Siefker said she witnessed two women decide not to abort. The first woman was walking into Planned Parenthood for abortion counseling, the second for the procedure itself. Those who were praying on the sidewalk offered both women another option, and both headed to the Women’s Care Center instead.

“We are just grateful for the help that [the counselors of the Women’s Care Care Center] give these women,” Siefker summarized.

Siefker also expressed the hope to end abortion “one soul at a time.”

Although the Women’s Care Center already serves a steady stream of nearly 10 women each day, Zatkulak estimated they could double that number with their current staff and equipment. She, however, does not want their life-saving efforts to stop there.

“I would love for us to get to the point where we need a second ultrasound machine and the doorbell’s ringing all day,” she said.

(Katie Rutter is a freelance writer and member of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington. The new Women’s Care Center is located at 409 S. College Ave. in Bloomington. Information about all of the centers can be found at supportwomenincarecenter.org.)
On April 4, 1968, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy gave a speech to a large African-American audience in Indianapolis in the wake of the assassination earlier that day in Memphis, Tenn., of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The speech has been widely attributed as the cause of Indianapolis remaining at peace on King’s death. The day ended with so many other cities suffering violent riots.

The following is the text of Kennedy’s speech. The text can be found at: https://www.kingcenter.org/speeches/RFKcomknight.html

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He was so affected in part because the example of Rev. King had helped him be open to God’s call to priestly service.

He was a big part of why I went ahead and became a priest,” said Father Taylor, pastor of Holy Angels and St. Rita parishes, both in Indianapolis. “Him being a minister and the Church’s involvement in the civil rights movement—it just made me important the work of the Church can be in changing lives for the better, changing the nation for the better.”

Like Carr and Rodriguez, King’s death led him to be committed to serve all that the Church is.

“It confirmed it even more, that the role of the Church is important,” Father Taylor reflected.

Looking back 50 years later, Father Taylor sees much contemporary relevance in Rev. King’s death and Kennedy’s speech.

“There is nationwide significance to it,” Father Taylor said. “So many people are trying to rev up fear and division and reactionary kinds of things.

“But that speech was a reminder that we need to fight evil with good, to come together, to draw out the higher qualities of our country, and link Father King’s division and the fears of others and the unknown, which a lot of people are doing today.”

Carr agrees and sees faith as offering an alternative to divisiveness and distrust.

“We can’t give in to that,” she said. “The people who are constantly praying that all of this trauma and discord will come to an end. I think it’s tearing our country apart. You just have to keep moving forward with the things that you know you can do and get accomplished to help to put an end to it.”

Leaning on prayer is one way Carr plans to move forward. It also gives her a broader perspective on the challenges that continue to face society 50 years after that tragic day in 1968.

“I firmly believe that prayer really changes things,” she said. “It may not change things the way you want them to be changed, the way you’re praying for it to be changed. But if you just keep praying for change to come for the betterment of people and the quality of their life, I believe it will come.”

Phyllis Carr, a member of St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis, answers a phone call on April 2 in the Indianapolis office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She attended the speech given in Indianapolis by Robert F. Kennedy 50 years ago on April 4, 1968, the day on which Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

Robert F. Kennedy, right, gives a speech on April 4, 1968, in a park at 177th Street and Broadway Ave. in Indianapolis on the day of the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The speech has been credited with the fact that Indianapolis remained calm in the wake of King’s death.

Indianapolis Recorder-Collection, Indiana Historical Society.

Kennedy’s call for love, wisdom and compassion

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St. Rita parishioner recalls interactions with late civil rights leader

By Natalie Hofer

It was April 4, 1968. Twenty years old at the time, Charles Guynn and his fiancee Mary were at a skating rink in Indianapolis when suddenly the music stopped.

“The guy who was spinning the records made the announcement,” he recalls: the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., had been assassinated.

“I can’t even express how I felt,” Guynn says, starting to choke back tears 50 years later. “What do you say when you lose someone who gave you so much and never expected anything in return?”

Guynn employs the word “you” not in the general sense, but in direct reference to himself—the 70-year-old member of St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis who knew Rev. King personally.

His multiple interactions with the renowned minister and civil rights leader over the course of several months in 1967 and 1968 left a lasting impact on the African-American Catholic.

‘Just another minister’

Through his involvement at St. Rita and his friendship with the parish’s then-pastor, Father Bernard Strange, Guynn came to know quite a few movers and shakers on the local and national civil rights front in the late 1960s.

One of those activists was Father Strange’s friend, Rev. Dr. Andrew J. Brown, then-pastor of Indianapolis’ St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church. According to Guynn, the church was ground zero for much of the planning of the civil rights movement in the city, the state and even the nation, in the late 1960s.

Father Strange invited Guynn to join him at the meetings. It was there that he met Rev. King, a close friend of Rev. Brown’s. It was there that he met Rev. King, a close friend of Rev. Brown’s. He recalls joining “both black and white” priests, Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis for “planning meetings in the basement of St. John’s [Baptist Church]. They were planning for civil actions: How to approach the legislature, deciding what the issue was, which legislator to approach on an issue. Would there be a demonstration? Would it be in Indianapolis or down south in Alabama or Mississippi? The whole idea of [Rev. ] King was to get away from that area [in the south] to plan, then take the plan back to those areas.”

At the age of 19, Guynn saw it all in stride.

“Back then I did not even begin to understand [Rev. King’s] greatness and what he was doing,” he says. “I thought he was just another minister, because I met many ministers who came through St. John’s to visit.

Father Strange and Guynn would “sit down and have dinner with [Rev.] Andrew J. Brown … along with [Rev.] Martin Luther King … I saw [Rev. King] enough that he developed a nickname for me. He called me Chickie. I think he knew I hated that. He’s the only one I let call me that.”

‘Violence only leads to violence’

But Guynn admits that he “became captivated with [Rev. King’s] sensitivity toward his fellow man. He was really strong on that, and really strong on rights, that all people deserve their rights. I never saw any kind of prejudice or racism come from him.”

“I think he was a holy man. He sacrificed his life, his family, his kids for the good of others.”

Guynn notes that, conversely, he himself was “a bit of a lightning rod” at the time.

“Being a youngster, I tended to be more like Malcolm X—You got to do something! You can’t just let people hit you and spit on you!”

Youth theater group in Greenwood to perform Pirates of Penzance

The Agape Performing Arts Company, a ministry of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood, will perform Pirates of Penzance, the most popular operetta of the 19th century British duo Gilbert and Sullivan, on April 20-22 and April 27-29 at the Knights of Columbus’ McGowan Hall, 1305 N. Delaware St., in Indianapolis.

The production will begin at 7:30 p.m. on April 20, 21, 27 and 28. There will also be performances at 3:30 p.m. on April 21, 22, 28 and 29. VIP tickets are $15, $10 for adults and $5 for children 11 years and under.
Pope, MLK share common dream, Vatican official says

VALENCIAN CITY (CNS)—The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of a dignified life for all men and women regardless of color or creed continues to live on in the teachings of one of his most influential admirers, Pope Francis, a Vatican representative said.

Speaking to Vatican News on April 3, the eve of the 50th anniversary of Rev. King’s assassination, Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Vatican observer to United Nations agencies in Geneva, said both the slain civil rights leader and the head of the Catholic Church have “brought universal attention to a new vision of the world.”

“Of course, Martin Luther King did it in the defense of human rights of the African-American people. The pope, instead, brings a new vision of the Church,” Archbishop Jurkovic said.

Rev. King’s legacy of nonviolent resistance to the injustices suffered by African-Americans in the United States, he said, began a “new era” that ushered in “a general development of society and democracy” in the world.

Archbishop Jurkovic said that the same Christian-inspired message, echoed by many influential leaders today like Pope Francis, has two important guiding principles that are pertinent in today’s tumultuous political climate.

The first principle “is nonviolence, a principle that has become somewhat problematic today in the face of the many violent actions that surround us. Then there is the principle of universal fraternity: to consider all people as beneficiaries of the same brotherhood,” Archbishop Jurkovic said.

Those principles, he added, not only must remain relevant for those working at a bureaucratic level crafting policy in the United Nations, but must be defended by influential leaders in society today.

“Pope Francis does it, and he does it in a splendid way—and everyone recognizes the role he has gained in such a short time,” the archbishop said. “The pope believes that the only future worthy of the human person is one that includes everyone.”

But also how women were being treated. He believed in equality of women being paid the same as men, and he talked about men’s responsibility to be real men.

Do your homework, and don’t flunk.

As Guynn became a fixture at the monthly or semi-monthly meetings, Rev. Brown called upon him to take on a special responsibility himself. In 1967, he asked the young Catholic to oversee the Indianapolis branch of Operation Breadbasket, an inner-city youth outreach program created by Rev. King.

“It was a weekly informational program dealing with leadership, guidance, religious ethics, being responsible for yourself and what you need to do in the community,” Guynn explains. “It was a lot of education building, not so much ‘ab’ but more on what you need to do to assist the growth of the community,”

Through Operation Breadbasket, Guynn oversaw 2,000 youths and 200 supervising adults in digging, planting and harvesting vegetable gardens in vacant neighborhood lots. The produce was sold at youth-run farmers’ markets.

To help the new, young leader, Rev. King offered “Chuckie” some advice.

“He said, ‘Number one, before you do anything, do your homework,’” Guynn recalls. “‘Next, he said to understand who you’re going before, their strengths and weaknesses. Make sure you deliver your message in an articulate way. Understand where the kids are, so you can …’ better give them guidance.’”

“Guynn says Rev. King’s final words of advice were, ‘You have one chance—don’t flunk!’”

That advice, and the example of Rev. King’s peaceful yet powerful activism, made a lasting impact on Guynn.

“It’s why I was involved in community action,” he says. “Anything dealing with the betterment of the community, I want to be part of it.”

“What I learned, I carry today.”

And so he has been. The highlights of Guynn’s efforts to better the community include serving roughly two decades on the Indiana Black Expo board, 17 years of which he was treasurer; directing the Indianapolis-Marion County Commission on Human Rights for three years upon the appointment of former Indianapolis Mayor Williams Hudnut; and instructing Indianapolis Police Department officers on race relations for about eight years, again by the appointment of Mayor Hudnut.

Guynn’s desire to serve also extended to the Church. He has long been a member of the Knights of Peter Claver, even serving as national secretary. In that role, he has part of a team of the National Presbyteral Council II to discuss the importance of black Catholic leadership in the United States.

“Closer to home, he was a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) basketball coach and served as president of St. Rita’s parish council. He has received a Serra Club Award, the CYO’s Moir-Albert Bussaud Service Award and St. John Bosco Award, and the archdiocese’s Spirit of Service award in 2011.

At 70, Guynn still seeks to better the community. For a year and a half, he has served as executive director of Community Outreach for Financial Education (COFFE), Inc., a nonprofit organization that offers personal financial literacy education, as well as sustainability programs for nonprofit and for-profit businesses.

“To this day at COFFE, I make sure I’ve done my homework and tell myself, ‘Don’t flunk,’” says Guynn, just as Rev. King advised him 50 years ago. “What I learned [from him], I definitely carry today: don’t be quick to judge, be understanding, and know that each person has different size shoes, and you have to walk in those shoes to understand where they’re coming from.”

Heard Catholic Radio Indy...
Faith

Christ renewed gift of divine mercy through St. Faustina

By Emily Janimet

Known as the Apostle of divine mercy, St. Faustina Kowalska brought the message of God’s deep and passionate love for all of humanity. At her canonization in 2000, St. John Paul II said, “The life of this humble daughter of Poland can stand alongside the history of the 20th century...” Christ entrusted his message of mercy to her, and she cannot be a new message, but rather considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely.”

Faustina was born in 1905 to a poor peasant family in a small village in Poland. Named Helen at her baptism, she was the third of 10 children. Her family lived on a 1.4-acre farm. Her father also worked at a brewery to provide for the needs of the family. Despite their poverty, her parents taught their children the importance of living out their Catholic faith in daily life.

From a young age, Helen always felt drawn to the religious life, but she experienced many obstacles in pursuing this vocation. In her diary, she wrote, “From the age of 7 I have experienced the definite call of God, the grace of a vocation to the religious life... I heard God’s voice in my soul; that is, an invitation to a perfect life.”

Despite the joy she felt in becoming a religious sister, she had many trials and struggles, including tuberculosis, which led to her early death.

Considered a mystic, Faustina spread the message of divine mercy in her personal journal called Dives in Misericordia (“Rich in Mercy”). It is considered a gift of special enlightenment with experiences of Christ and Mary. The diary details aspects of the divine mercy devotion.

The Feb. 22, 1931, entry of her diary states that Christ instructed Faustina to have an image painted like the one she saw in her convent cell that night. He told her, “Paint me an image... with the signature, ‘Jesus, I trust in you.’”

The image depicts Jesus with two bright rays of light, one red and the other white, flowing from his heart. The lighter ray symbolizes water, which “makes souls righteous,” and the red ray symbolizes blood, which “is the life of the souls.”

According to Faustina, there are special graces for those who pray before this image. “By means of this image, I shall be granting many graces to souls; so let every soul have access to it,” Christ told her.

Christ also instructed Faustina that there should be a great feast day to celebrate his mercy.

Known as Divine Mercy Sunday, this feast day falls on the second Sunday of Easter, pointing to the close relationship between the paschal mystery and God’s mercy. “I desire that the feast of mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners,” Christ told her.

Special graces are available on this feast day, and Faustina presented the conditions for receiving these graces. Most important, she writes, one must be in a state of grace, have gone to confession and received Communion. Another aspect of the divine mercy devotion is the chaplet of divine mercy, which is prayed on the beads of a rosary.

The prayer, beginning with, “Eternal Father, I offer myself, body, soul and divinity of your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ,” unites us to the crucifixion.

Another line from the prayer states: “For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.” This powerful phrase is the backbone for the chaplet and the driving force for why we pray it, for the people in our lives, loved ones, friends, family members and the whole world.

Another aspect of the devotion, the “hour of mercy,” observed at 3 p.m., is the customary time Christians remember Christ’s death on the cross. “It was the hour of grace for the whole world—mercy triumphed over justice,” Faustina recorded in her diary. Pray the Stations of Cross, adore Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament or “immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be, if only for a very brief instant,” Christ instructed Faustina.

One other aspect of divine mercy is spreading the devotion and the hour of mercy. “Souls who spread the honor of my mercy I shall protect through their entire life as a tender mother her infant, and at the hour of death I will not be a judge for them, but the merciful savior,” Christ said to her.

We are called to actively share this message by living a life of deeds, words and prayers of mercy. When we show mercy and love to others, Christ is merciful toward us.

The divine mercy message is a message of hope for all sinners, helping us to grow in trust of Our Lord and teaching us how to be people of mercy.

(Emily Janimet is a Catholic author, speaker, radio personality, wife and mother of seven children. She is the author of The Friendship Project and co-author of Divine Mercy for Moms. Her website is emilyjanimet.com.)

In life and death, St. John Paul II embodied message of divine mercy

By Marge Fenelon

There are many notable things about the life and papacy of St. John Paul II, but one of the most notable is his devotion to divine mercy.

In 1980, he issued an encyclical that was part of a trilogy of encyclicals on the Trinity that emphasized divine mercy. It was the encyclical on God the Father, “Dives in Misericordia” (“Rich in Mercy”), in which he outlines the truth and meaning of mercy from biblical times to the present and beyond.

In it, he states mankind’s mission of mercy. “The Church must profess and proclaim God’s mercy in all its truth, as it has been handed down to us by revelation,” he wrote (#13). He took this task upon himself, becoming for many the champion of mercy devotion.

Not surprisingly, he seemed to have found in St. Faustina Kowalska a kindred spirit. He wrote a letter of encouragement and holy nun of the Ladies of Our Lady of Mercy in Poland who received extraordinary revelations of Our Lord. Jesus instructed Faustina to record his messages of God’s divine mercy. She did and compiled them into a diary.

Faustina’s message reverberated in John Paul II’s heart, as he demonstrated in his homily at her canonization on April 30, 2000. “And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of divine mercy, help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters.

“In my message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred, and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood.

“Today, fixing our gaze with you on the face of the risen Christ, let us make our own prayer of trusting abandonment and say with firm hope: Christ Jesus, I trust in you.”

At the same time, John Paul II declared Divine Mercy Sunday to be celebrated worldwide on the Sunday after Easter.

In 2002, the apostolic penitentiary of the Holy See issued a decree granting a plenary indulgence to those who comply with all the established conditions (confession, Communion and praying for the pope’s intentions) and a partial indulgence to those who incompletely fulfill the conditions.

This was in accordance with Jesus’ own wishes as told to Faustina. Together, these two papal acts are the highest endorsements the Church can give to a private revelation.

In his 2001 homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, John Paul II pointed to the revelations of Faustina as “the appropriate and incisive answer that God wanted to offer to the questions and expectations of human beings in our time, marked by terrible tragedies... Divine Mercy! This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity at the dawn of the third millennium.”

His confidence in divine mercy never wavered. Throughout his life, he not only promoted it, he personified it. As if to crown his work, providence saw to it that John Paul II died on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005. He was canonized on April 27, 2014, which was Divine Mercy Sunday that year.

(Marge Fenelon is a freelance writer from Milwaukee. Her website is margefenelon.com.)

Trying to find the Hasler Hotel in Rome: a comedy skit

You’ll enjoy this story of one of my visits to Rome. The episode would have made a good comic strip, with some background.

After the World Congress on Catholic Church in Vienna in 1977, I returned home and drove with my wife Marie to Rome, stopping at Lake Garda on the way. One of those places was Verona, Italy. It was dark when we got there and this, of course, was before smart phone GPS or cars in GPS. We had maps. We finally let up the hill from the Garda lake and got out to go to the corner to see where we were. Then we would find that intersection that we eventually got to the Due Torri (Two Towers). When we told the desk clerk at the hotel how much trouble we had finding the hotel, he gave us some advice: “When you’re in a strange city and don’t know how to get somewhere, find a taxi and tell the driver to drive to the place you want to go and pay the taxi driver a regular taxi fare.”

Here’s, we had reservations at the Hasler Hotel at the top of the Spanish Steps, but I didn’t know how to get to that level. I told the driver I wanted the Via del Corso and stopped at a traffic signal when a taxi was dropping off its passengers. Marie said, “I know how to do this. I work hotel clerk said,” and jumped out of the car.

She went up to the taxi, but instead of telling him to drive to the Hasler Hotel and I would follow her into the front seat. The taxi driver said, “My husband will follow in that car behind us.”

The taxi driver apparently got the idea that Marie was going to meet someone at the Hasler Hotel and her husband was following her. So he thought Marie wanted him to lose me. The first thing he did was make a U-turn. I made a U-turn, too. We flew down the Via del Corso until he suddenly made another U-turn. This time he got off the taxi and told the driver to follow him in your car and pay the cab driver a regular taxi fare.”

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The Sunday Readings

Sunday, April 8, 2018

- 1 John 5:1-6
- John 20:19-31

As almost always in the Easter season, the Acts of the Apostles furnishes the Liturgy of the Word with its first reading for Mass on this weekend.


As it progresses, Acts traces for some years the development of the infant Church, describing the experiences of the first members. In so doing, it provides a fascinating insight into the formation of the Church, as well as a powerful lesson in the basic beliefs that so compelled absolute loyalty and devotion from the early Christians whom Acts praises.

It also gives great examples of unqualified selflessness, the idea that might makes right, human ignorance and treachery.

In this weekend’s reading, Acts presents the first members of the Church as being “of one heart and one mind” (Acts 4:32). Love for and adherence to the Lord were supreme for them.

Central in the story were the Apostles, the Lord’s special followers and students, whom Jesus commissioned to continue the work of salvation. The Apostles had seen the Resurrection, so the first Christians revered them.

Love for others, in the model of Jesus, was more than a platitudinous. The early Christians assisted the poor, for instance, as much as the Lord also did.

St. John’s First Epistle supplies the second reading, defining what being a Christian means.

All believers must give themselves fully in love to God, through trust and faith in Jesus Christ, as a sign of this commitment, and because of the Lord’s redeeming acts, each Christian is a child of God. This term means much more than merely earthly creation. It means eternal life.

Baptism in water symbolizes this absolute commitment.

The Gospel reading for Mass this weekend is from St. John’s Gospel. It is a resurrection narrative, a story with which most Christians are quite familiar. Recall the story of the followers of Jesus when they found the empty tomb? Where had the body of the Lord been taken?

This reading answers the question: “The body of the Lord has not been taken. Jesus lives! The encounter with the doubting, demanding Thomas affirms this glorious fact.

Resurrection from the dead is stunning in itself, but Jesus further acts as God by conferring the power of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. He grants them the authority of forgiving sins, a divine privilege as sins afflict God. He sends them to the four corners of the world to bring redemption to all humanity.

Passing through locked doors as if doors were thin air, Jesus greeted the Apostles with “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19). Jesus makes clear that peace only is in God. The living Lord is the sole source of peace.

Reflection

This weekend, the Church calls its people to have faith and to rejoice. The resurrection and redemption in Jesus should not simply refer to an event in history, but to living realities for us to experience here and now.

It is time for us to find consolation and strength in Jesus, crucified, risen and living still.

We observe Divine Mercy Sunday on this day. In and through Jesus, the merciful Son of God, divine mercy is with us here and now.

While sin and human limitation often present considerable obstacles in our progress toward God, the Lord left us the Apostles, and through them and the Church they assisted in forming us. We find forgiveness, the light to see the way to follow Jesus, hope, peace and life.

Daily Readings

Monday, April 9

The Annunciation of the Lord

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10

Psalm 40:7-11

Hebrews 10:4-10

Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday, April 10

Acts 4:32-37

Psalm 93:1-2, 5

John 3:7b-15

Wednesday, April 11

St. Stanislaus, bishop and martyr

Acts 5:17-26

Psalm 54:2-9

John 3:16-21

Thursday, April 12

Acts 5:27-33

Psalm 34:2, 9, 17-20

John 3:31-36

Friday, April 13

St. Martin I, pope and martyr

Acts 5:34-42

Psalm 27:1-3, 7-14

John 6:1-15

Saturday, April 14

Acts 6:1-7

Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19

John 6:16-21

Sunday, April 15

Third Sunday of Easter


Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-9

1 John 2:1-5a

Luke 24:35-48

Question Corner/Fr. Kenneth Doyle

Pontifical Academy of Sciences members chose as their academic credentials

Stephen Hawking died recently. As I understand it, Professor Hawking once claimed to have proven that God does not exist. And yet the pope met with him and recognized his studies. Why would the pope meet that and celebrate an atheist? (Virginia)

A Professor Stephen Hawking, the renowned British theoretician, died at age 76 on March 14, 2018, after a long battle with Lou Gehrig’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Though many commentators called him an avowed atheist, I would see him rather as an agnostic.

As he once told ABC News, “One can’t prove that God doesn’t exist. But science makes God unnecessary… The laws of physics can explain the universe without the need for a creator.” The origin of the universe, in Hawking’s mind, was billions of years ago in the Big Bang theory—and since whatever may have occurred before that could not be observed by science, it was irrelevan to him.

Over the years, Hawking met with four different popes, the last being Pope Francis in November 2016. In 1986, Hawking had been named by Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

That group, which includes scholars from several religions and some who profess no faith, exists as a forum to foster dialogue between science and faith, and its members are chosen primarily for their academic credentials.

In the past, the academy has discussed such topics as the potential perils of nuclear war. The focus of its 2016 gathering was ecology—the impact of technology on the planet—and Pope Francis spoke to them of the profound need for an “ecological conversion” in which people recognize their responsibility for caring for creation and its resources.

Hawking always respected the Church’s contribution to this dialogue, and upon his death, a tweet from the Vatican observatory said, “We value the enormous scientific contribution he has made to quantum cosmology, and the courage he had in facing illness.”

Though Hawking professed no belief in an afterlife (once telling the British journal The Guardian, “I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail”), a tweet from the pontifical academy expressed a prayer at his death that the Lord would now “welcome him into his glory.”

Years ago, as I recall, special prayers were offered just before the end of the liturgy of the conversion of Russia. I believe that those prayers, to a certain extent, worked.

We may say similar prayers now for the elimination of terrorism throughout the world? It couldn’t hurt. I do say myself one prayer before Mass starts for this intention, but we need several voices. (Oregon)

In the 1880s, Pope Leo XIII asked that prayers be offered to St. Michael the Archangel at the end of Mass, asking for an end to violence. At the time, Pope Leo’s principal concern was as the wave of terrorism in Catholic countries of Europe, where the liberty of the Church was under attack by revolutionary forces.

In 1930, Pope Pius XI “redirected” those Leonine prayers and asked that they be offered for the tranquillity and freedom of the Catholic Church in Russia. The practice was discontinued in the 1960s.

Since then, Church leaders have from time to time authored prayers against terrorism, most notably Pope Francis during a 2016 visit to Poland for World Youth Day.

They have, in part, “We come to you [God] today to ask you to keep the peace in the world and its peoples, to keep far away from it the devastating wave of terrorism, to restore friendship and instill in the hearts of your creatures the gift of trust and of readiness to forgive.

Touch the hearts of terrorists so that they may recognize the evil of their actions and may turn to the way of peace and goodness, of respect for the life and of the dignity of every human being, regardless of religion, origin, wealth or poverty.”

That far, there has been no call for the universal use of such a prayer at every Mass, but I think it is excellent that you are praying personally for this same intention.

(Answers may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbus Circle Dr, Albany, New York 12203)
**Franciscan Sister Millie Speed served in retreat ministry and education**

Conventional Franciscan Brother Bob Baxter, a member of the Our Lady of Consolation Province, served in retreat ministry and education at the chapels of the archdiocese of St. Francis at Mount St. Francis, died on March 22 in New Albany. He was 69.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on April 5 at the chapel of the Conventual Franciscans at Mount St. Francis. Interment followed in the columbarium of the friars’ cemetery.


HOBEN, Brother of Father of Ashley Harrison and Andrea Lucas. Son of Marion Harrison. Brother of James Harrison, South Bend, and Todd Harrison. Brother of one. Great-grandfather of one.


HUTCHESON, Margaret (You), 80, Holy Family, New Albany. Husband of Sister of Linda Woodyard. Husband of Margaret Foreman, Maureen Harrison, Fred and Margaret Foreman.


TAKAB, Gloria M., 61, St. Simon the Apostle, Indianapolis, March 22. Wife of Father of Kristin Eichler, Tyler McCleary and Travis Tabak. Grandmother of seven. 

**RIP**

**Resist the urge to**

**Franciscan Sister Millie Speed served as an educator, missionary to the Navajo**

Conventional Franciscan Sister Millie Speed died on March 23 at the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Oldenburg. She was 93.

Sister Millie Speed was born in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 4, 1939, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1945. During 79 years as a Sister of St. Francis, Sister Millie Speed ministered as an educator for 54 years in Catholic schools in Illinois, Indiana, Arizona and Ohio. In the archdiocese, she served at St. Louis School in Batesville from 1950-51. St. Mary School in Greenbloom from 1951-52. St. Vincent de Paul School in Bedford from 1958-60 and at Our Lady of Lourdes School in Indianapolis from 1960-65.

Beginning in 1996, Sister Millie began nine years of service as a missionary in the Navajo in New Mexico. She then retired to the motherhouse in Oldenburg in 2005. Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47360-0100.

**Franciscan Sister Millie Speed**

**Deacon Anthony Lewis gives holy oil to Bishop**

Deacon Anthony Lewis gives holy oil to Bishop Mark Seitz during the March 27 chrism Mass. Also assisting with the distribution of blessed oils is Deacon Oliver Jackson, left. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)
reason why I accomplish everything I accomplish and the reason why I’m here.”

Q. Talk about the role that your Catholic faith has played in your life—and how you try to live your life and your faith.

A. “My Catholic faith has done a lot for me. I’ve been going to church and studying the Catholic faith since as early as I can remember. It just helps me get away and be able to talk to God and have a one-on-one with him that I may not be able to have elsewhere.

The Catholic Church is like a get-away for me. Somewhere I can go and just be at peace. It’s done a great job of just helping me realize that, through tough times, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Q. You’re known for your joy in singing. And you and your mother have both been cantors in church. How much do you enjoy that as an outlet for your faith?

A. “I love singing. I’ve been since I was a little kid in church. It’s just great, man. There’s nothing like a great song, a great church song. It’s influenced me not only my Church life, but my life in general. I feel there’s a song for everything. And I just try to bring that joy to whatever it is I do.”

Q. You’re known for your tremendous work ethic, your focus and your humility. Who are the major influences in your life who have led you to embrace those qualities?

A. “My mom, my sisters, my dad. That’s where it all started for me—in my household and how I was raised. That’s why I’m the man I am today.”

Q. Both your parents are originally from Nigeria. How has that background shaped your life?

A. “It’s been good. They showed me how to work hard. They were both Nigerian immigrants. They came over here 32 years ago, and they had to work hard in order to get whatever they wanted. And they instilled that work ethic in me. And that’s where it comes from.”

Q. You have a close relationship with your three sisters, including your sister Kendra who became deaf when she was 6 after an illness. Talk about your relationship with her and the influence she has had on you.

A. “We have a very positive relationship. She can call me, text me and talk to me about anything. And I can do the same thing with her. She has been through a lot in her lifetime. And just seeing her and talking to her and being around her just motivates me to work even harder—because she got through it. She got through a tough time. I can get through anything just watching what she did.”

Q. You’re embraced being a part of the Indiana Pacers, and your passion has shined through when you say, “This is my city!” And the fans and the community have embraced you. Talk about what that connection means to you—and why you have embraced it so passionately.

A. “It’s a lot a lot to me. It’s kind of where it all turned around for me here in Indiana. Playing at Indiana University and coming back here and playing for these people in this city has been nothing short of a blessing. It’s been amazing. They’ve done a great job of just welcoming me, and I’ve embraced it. I’m just taking it one day at a time. I’ve got to continue to keep getting better so I keep representing them well.”

Q. When you returned to Bloomington for an Indiana University basketball game earlier this year, you received another warm welcome there. What did it mean to you to have that experience?

A. “It was an amazing experience, an amazing feeling. Something that I always wanted to do, and luckily I had the opportunity to do so. It was something I’ll always cherish and I’ll always remember.”

Q. What was the best part of the All-Star experience for you?

A. “It was fun. It was a great time. I think the best part about it was just being able to experience it with my family and friends. It’s something that I’ll always remember and look forward to keep doing for the rest of my career.”

Q. Your father was part of that experience. What did that mean to you?

A. “I meant a lot to see him there. We have a special relationship now. It was great to see him there physically and being able to give him a hug after the game and to see how proud he was of me. It was just an amazing feeling. Words can’t really describe how great it was.”

Q. How would you describe your overall approach to life?

A. “That’s a good question. I think the biggest approach for me is, I’m always on a mission. I guess you would say, to be great—and to show everybody that God is the reason I’m chasing greatness. At the end of the day, I feel as though this is what I’m supposed to be doing. God blessed me with this ability not only to impact people around me, but the people in the world as well. And that’s what I’m trying to do with this game. I’m just trying to show my belief and my faith in the game I play in. I play for an audience of one every night I go out there and play. I just got to continue to keep getting better. The sky’s the limit for me, but I just take one day at a time.”

Victor Oladipo shoots over the outstretched hand of Brooklyn Nets player Allen Crabbe during a game earlier this year. (Photo courtesy of Pacers Sports & Entertainment)

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Jesus does not give up on anyone, Pope Francis tells prisoners

ROME (CNS)—Before washing the feet of 12 prisoners, Pope Francis told them and hundreds of inmates to remember that Jesus constantly stands before them with love, ready to cleanse their sins and forgive them.

“Jesus takes a risk on each of us. Know this: Jesus is called Jesus, not Pontius Pilate. Jesus does not know how to wash his hands of us; he only knows how to take a risk on us,” the pope said on March 29 during his homily at Rome’s Regina Coeli prison.

Pope Francis celebrated the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord’s Supper at the prison and washed the feet of a dozen inmates. Four were Italian; two were from the Philippines; two from Morocco; and one each from Moldova, Colombia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the Vatican press office said.

Eight of the 12 were Catholic; two were Muslim; one was Orthodox; and one was Buddhist.

In his brief homily before the foot-washing ritual, Pope Francis explained to the prisoners that in Jesus’ day, the job of washing feet was the task of a slave. “There wasn’t asphalt or cobblestones, there was dust and people’s feet got dirty,” so before they went into a house, the slaves would wash the person’s feet.

The Gospel recounts Jesus washing the feet of his own disciples “to give us an example of how we must serve one another,” the pope said.

Another time, he said, Jesus explained to his disciples that kings want to be served. “Think of the kings and emperors back then, so many were cruel, they insisted on being served by slaves,” the pope said.

But Jesus told his followers: “Among you, you must not be like this. The one who rules must serve,” the pope explained.

“Jesus overturns the historic and cultural attitudes of his age—and of today, too,” Pope Francis told the inmates. Jesus says that “the one who rules, in order to be a king, must serve,” the pope said. “When I kneel before each of you, think, ‘Jesus took a risk on this man, a sinner, to come to me and tell me he loves me.’ This is service. This is Jesus. He never abandons us. He never tires of forgiving us. He loves us so much.”

The pope celebrated the Mass of the Lord’s Supper in the rotunda of the prison, a small central area formed from the intersection of various wings of the jail. The prison is designed to house 600 inmates, but currently houses more than 900 men. Some 65 percent of the inmates are non-Italians, Vatican News reported.

At the end of the Mass, a prisoner publicly thanked Pope Francis for his visit and said the inmates would try to do, at least symbolically, what he recommended at his general audience at the Vatican the day before: “celebrate Easter by splashing water on their eyes to look at the world with fresh eyes.”

The 81-year-old pope responded by confirming to the prisoners that, like many people his age, he is developing cataracts and will have an operation next year to fix them.

But, he said, as life goes on and people get busy or make mistakes, they can develop “cataracts of the soul” that prevent them from seeing the world with the hope that is born of Jesus’ resurrection.

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