Synod groups: Ecology, violence, migration among challenges for Church

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Proposals made by the small groups at the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon not only involved theological matters, but also the Catholic Church’s role in helping indigenous communities confront issues such as ecology, violence and migration.

The Church must continue to reaffirm the rights of indigenous peoples to their “land, culture, language, history identity and spirituality” as well as “defend their rights to prior, free and informed consent to projects in their territories,” the Italian-A group noted.

“Indigenous people, people of African descent, fishermen, migrants and other traditional communities in the Amazon are threatened like never before and are often divided or strategically weakened by the seductions of money and power,” the group noted.

The 12 small-group reports, published by the Vatican on Oct. 18, were the result of reflections in groups organized by language; each group summarized its members’ conclusions and offered proposals for the whole synod.

Several groups made proposals that call on the Church to take a more active role in protecting the environment, both in practical and concrete measures.

“An ecological conversion to a sober life is indispensable, which implies changes in mentalities, in lifestyle, in modes of production, in practices of accumulation, consumption and waste. We already know that ‘later, it will be too late!’ ” the Portuguese-B group noted.

The Portuguese-C group stressed that to be a “visible and credible witness of ecological conversion” means that the Church must also be ecologically conscience in practical actions such as recycling and eliminating the use of plastic.

The Spanish-E group highlighted the importance of ensuring that the “fruits of the Amazonian synod become a reality,” and called for the establishment of a “postsynodal process” as well as through “ecological conversion” as well as through “practical and concrete measures.

Mother of three lives her legacy of faith while facing devastating, rare cancer

By John Shaughnessy

Dr. Beth Wehlage of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis has relied upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus during her journey of suffering and faith while dealing with cancer. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

During each radiation treatment for her stage 4 cancer, Dr. Beth Wehlage clutched a cross, a rosary that had been blessed at Lourdes, and a crucifix that was a gift from the Sisters of St. Benedict.

As she tried to stay motionless so the radiation could pinpoint the area behind her ear where the cancer had concentrated, the 58-year-old mother of three prayed the rosary, the seven sorrows of the Blessed Mother and the prayers of St. Bridget on the Passion of Christ.

She prayed for healing, for strength, for God’s will, all the time focusing on an image that had given her comfort during her previous treatments for this most devastating stage of cancer—the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Yet on this day, Wehlage experienced something that had never happened before, something that still touches and stuns her.

“I pray to Jesus in front of me, and I feel him. Always.”

“I have found my God. He is with me. Always.”

Faley savor the gift of helping young adults grow closer to God

By John Shaughnessy

For 10 years, Matt Faley has been involved in trying to bring young adults and college students in the archdiocese into a closer relationship with God and the Church.

During that time, Faley has also seen his own faith life grow and develop as he has made the transitions from being single to being married and the father of three small children.

As Faley marks his 10th year, The Criterion invited the archdiocese’s director of Young Adult and College Campus Ministry to reflect on his own faith journey and the efforts to help those in the 18-35 age group on their faith journeys.

Q. From your perspective as the director of Young Adult and College Campus Ministry, what are young adults mostly seeking in their lives, and how can the Church help them in that search?
March theme pays tribute to pro-life view of early feminists

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Organizers of the March for Life have chosen “Life Empowered: Pro-Life Is Pro-Woman” for the 2020 rally and march in Washington.

In embracing the theme, Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life Education Fund, cited the coming centennial of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, and the views of early suffragists, including the best-known figure of the movement, Susan B. Anthony.

“Today’s present moment is marked by a profound confusion of what it means to be pro-woman,” Mancini said at a U.S. Capitol panel discussion on Oct. 15. “We’ve come a long way from ‘Safe, legal and rare’ to ‘Shout your abortion.’

Next year’s rally and march, always held near the anniversary of the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision of 1973, which legalized most forms of abortion on demand, will be on Jan. 24. The event in recent years has drawn more than 100,000 marchers.

President Donald J. Trump has addressed the rally via video hookup from the White House. His Homeland Security and Vice President Mike Pence was a rally speaker in 2017 and this year. A full list of rally speakers will be announced in the coming weeks.

Leaders of the suffrage movement, Mancini said, knew that mothers and babies were not at odds with each other. Citing Alice Paul, leader of the 19th Amendment, Mancini said Paul referred to abortion as “the ultimate exploitation of women.”

This was reinforced by another panelist, serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life, who said early American feminists condemned abortion “in no uncertain terms.”

Abortion, Foster said, “was constantly referred to as child murder and it was a frequently discussed topic in the feminist newspaper edited by Elizabeth Cary Stanton. Anthony, the best known feminist leader of her age, was a frequent contributor to the newspaper.”

A page on the website of the Susan B. Anthony House and Museum in Rochester, N.Y., disputes the notion Anthony can be considered a heroine to the pro-life movement, insisting her writings for the paper, called The Revolution, were mostly appeals to support the publication.

“This [pro-life] claim is based to a large extent on ‘Marriage and Maternity,’ an article written [in 1869] anonymously that disagreed with the views of a medical journal for laws against abortion, but nonetheless deplored it as ‘child-murder,’” the page states.

Representatives of the museum refused to comment to Catholic News Service about the Web page’s description of Anthony.

Mancini concluded her panel remarks by saying: “There is no known suffragist that was pro-abortion.”

Speaker Victoria Cobb, president of the Family Foundation of Virginia, called the promotion of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which supporters believe could enshrine abortion in the Constitution if adopted, “pure deception.”

The ERA was first introduced in 1923, shortly after the 19th Amendment was adopted. “It’s that old, that it’s outdated, and it’s past its prime,” Cobb said, adding that current proponents of the ERA are basing their support in “a 1970s mentality” meaning “for women to have parity with men, they had to appear not to be a mother.”

“In this mindset, motherhood, in all its glory, becomes a barrier to becoming equal to men,” she added.

“Abortion,” said Gloria Purvis, host of the Morning Glory program on EWTN Radio, “is predicated on the notion that the infant in the womb is really a man, human. Killing the poor is not a solution to poverty. And that is what the pro-abortion movement posits.”

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote was passed by the U.S. House on May 21, 1919, and by the U.S. Senate on June 4, 1919; it was then submitted to the states for ratification. On Aug. 18, 1920, Tennessee was the last of the necessary 36 states needed to ratify the measure, and the 19th Amendment was officially adopted on Aug. 26, 1920.
40 Days for Life is an organized prayer effort to save unborn lives and convert hearts to end abortion.

During the semi-annual 40-day campaigns, participants form a prayerful, peaceful presence in front of a Planned Parenthood abortion center or other abortion facility. According to the campaign’s website, the campaigns have grown from a single Texas location in 2007 to 816 cities in 56 countries today.

Two campaigns run in the archdiocese each spring and fall at Planned Parenthood abortion facilities—one in Bloomington and one in Indianapolis. The fall campaign began on Sept. 25 and will end on Nov. 3.

As The Criterion went to press, the Bloomington location reported two “saves”—a woman or a couple deciding to spare their unborn child’s life—and the Indianapolis site reported four possible saves.

Below are updates from both locations.

Bloomington

“The prayers of those participating do not go unanswered. And God has mercifully allowed us to see some of the fruit.”

“One example is a couple who had gone into the Bloomington Planned Parenthood for abortion counseling, despite being offered help by a sidewalk counselor. They remained inside for only 10 minutes, then came over to the advocate who had offered help. The woman was in tears and said that they couldn’t go through with the abortion. They accepted help next door at the pro-life Women’s Care Center.

“Another example is a couple that was inside the Planned Parenthood facility for a long time, receiving abortion counseling. They came out, appearing quite sad. They came over, and this time they accepted the blessing bag and talked for a bit with the sidewalk advocate. They went back to their car and looked over the material for a half-hour. As they pulled away, they were smiling and thanked the advocate for being there. From comments made, they seem to be on their way to now choosing life!” —Monica Sieker, St. John the Apostle Parish, Bloomington

Indianapolis

Tim O’Donnell, lead coordinator for the fall campaign in Indianapolis, reported that two cars stopped to speak with the sidewalk counselors one day in early October. One car had three women, and the other had one.

After talking with the counselors and accepting a blessing bag, both cars turned around and immediately went to the Women’s Care Center located next to the Planned Parenthood. Those who witnessed the possible saves noted that all four women had still not left after two hours in the pro-life organization’s building.

The event happened on Oct. 2, the feast of the Guardian Angels.

For additional information on the Indianapolis area 40 Days for Life campaign, contact Tim O’Donnell by calling 317-372-0040 or e-mail idipsumapere@me.com.

For additional information on the Bloomington campaign, contact Deacon Russ Woodard at 317-759-1225 or e-mail deaconrussw@gmail.com.

To sign up for an hour of prayer per week with any 40 Days for Life campaign location, go to 40daysforlife.com.

Members of St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish in Indianapolis promote respect for life outside the Planned Parenthood abortion facility in Indianapolis as part of an America Needs Fatima rosary rally of prayer for the conversion of hearts on Oct. 12. The rally fell within the timeframe of the 40 Days for Life fall prayer campaign taking place outside the same facility, the state’s largest abortion provider.

(Submitted photo by Tim O’Donnell)
Be Our Guest/Claudia Pfeiffer

A symbolic Eucharist? No, it is the body and blood of Jesus

Symbols? Really? Is that what the bread and wine of the holy Eucharist are? Is that all they are? Aren’t they, instead, the reality of transubstantiation? Perhaps that belief has been discarded by so many because it is difficult to explain—and next to impossible to understand with our finite minds.

Transubstantiation is the miraculous event where bread baked by man’s hands and wine extracted from grapes tend by man to be transformed into the real body and blood of Jesus Christ. It seems today that many people believe the bread of the Eucharist is only a symbol of our Lord’s body. And that the wine simply stands for Christ’s blood. This is not so. In fact, the bread is transformed into his sacred body, and the wine into his precious blood.

If it is only symbols, the holy Eucharist is a hollow promise. This certainly was not Jesus’ intention. He did not suffer immense pain in teaching his life for our sins for a symbol. Was it a facsimile of our Lord that died on the cross? What would be the value in that?

The Catholic Church teaches the reality of transubstantiation. It is a hard teaching to grasp. Rather than turning from this reality, or making it a symbol, as Catholics we must trust in our faith. We are not expected to find and understand all things spiritual. That’s where our faith comes in. That’s how we are able to accept that the body and wine are actually transformed into Christ’s real body and blood.

It’s not just once. Not just something that happened once thousands of years ago and since then is displayed as a symbol of Jesus’ institution of the Eucharist. Not just a one-time miracle, but an event that occurs every time the Catholic Mass is celebrated. As followers of Jesus Christ, when we receive the holy Eucharist, we receive his real body and blood. This is difficult to comprehend. It is much easier to accept the bread and wine as symbols of Christ’s body and blood.

But if we accept the Church’s teaching about transubstantiation, we realize the incredible value of the real presence of Christ to us. Here we receive the strength to believe, the love to sustain us, the mercy and the strength to believe, the love to sustain us, the mercy and the unconditional love of Christ today. Here we receive the holy Eucharist, we receive his body and blood. This is difficult to comprehend. It is much easier to accept the bread and wine as symbols of Christ’s body and blood.

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“True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.” (C. S. Lewis)

The Gospel reading for this weekend, the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, includes the familiar parable of two men at prayer. One prays with pride saying, “O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector” (Lk 18:11). The other “would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed: ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Lk 18:13). Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that the humility of the tax collector is greatly preferred to the arrogance of the Pharisee, a righteous man who says that he fasts twice a week and pays tithes on his whole income. “I tell you, the latter have justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14).

Humility is a challenging concept for most of us. We are taught by the values of our society to promote ourselves and our talents, to be proud of all the things we have accomplished, and to “be righteous” by being good and being seen to be good. Surely Jesus is not telling us to be “greedy, dishonest or adulterous” like those who are public sinners. But why is being proud of one’s own achievements so much preferred to arrogance?

The answer is to be found in the life and ministry of Jesus himself. As Pope Francis says, “Jesus did not sound the trumpet when he healed someone or preached or performed a miracle like the multiplication of the loaves. No, he was humble. He just did it. And he was close to the people.”

Quoting a popular hymn of his day, St. Paul tells us that humility is the essence of Jesus’ character: “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus.”

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

“Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:5-11).

Self-emptying is fundamentally important to Christian life. In order to follow Jesus and to serve his people, we have to get out of our own way. We need to acknowledge our own sinfulness and our inadequacy as ministers of the Gospel in order to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us with the power to witness effectively to the healing power of a loving and merciful God.

As Pope Francis reminds us, nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus exalt himself. Jesus’ authority came from his humility and not from proudly proclaiming, “I am the Messiah or I am the prophet.” In fact, the Gospel is filled with examples of Jesus’ attempts to downplay his accomplishments by either attributing them to his Father or by asking (often unsuccessfully) that the recipients of his healing and forgiveness “tell no one.”

Meekness and tenderness, Pope Francis says, are the two characteristics that define Jesus’ humility, and he challenges all of us who wish to be his disciples to do the same. Humility is a challenging concept for us because we have been taught that it is demeaning, that it somehow devalues us as persons. Nothing could be further from the truth. In all humility, we rightly believe that each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We are blessed by the grace of Christ who liberates us from the bondage of self and empowers us to work wonders in his name.

The virtue of humility does not make us less. It makes us more by acknowledging that God is the source of our goodness, our strength and our ability to care for the needs of others, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Let’s pray for the grace to pray like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.” And let’s ask God to help us remember that the good we do is not the result of our own efforts, or our own righteousness, but is entirely the result of God’s grace working in our lives.

Al igual que Jesús, imprimamos humildad a todo lo que hacemos...

La verdadera humildad no es considerarse menos que los demás, sino pensar menos en sí mismo.” (C. S. Lewis)

La lectura del Evangelio de este fin de semana, el domingo número 30 del Tiempo ordinario, incluye una parábola conocida sobre dos hombres que oran. Uno de ellos rezaba con orgullo y dice: “Oh, Dios! ¿Te desgracias porque yo no soy como los demás: ladrones, malvados y adúlteros. Tampoco soy como ese recaudador de impuestos” (Lc 18:11). El otro “ni siquiera se atrevía a levantar la vista del suelo, sino que se golpeaba el pecho y decía: ’Oh, Dios! Ten compasión de mí, que soy pecador’” (Lc 18:13).

Jesús nos dice muy claramente que la humildad del recaudador de impuestos es sin duda preferable a la arrogancia del fariseo, un hombre recto que dice que ayuna dos veces por semana y paga el diezmo sobre todo su ingreso. “Se dice que este recaudador de impuestos volvió a casa con sus pecados perdonados; el fariseo, en cambio, no. No se hubiera arrepentido a quien se enseña a sí mismo; pero enseñará a quien se humilde a sí mismo” (Lc 18:14).

La humildad es un concepto que resulta difícil para la mayoría de nosotros. Los valores de nuestra sociedad nos han enseñado a promovernos y a ensalzar nuestros talentos, a sentirnos orgullosos de todo lo que hemos logrado y a ser -jusos al ser buenos y que se nos perciba como buenos. Por supuesto que Jesús no nos dice que seamos “ladrones, malvados y adúlteros” como los pecadores públicos. ¿Por qué la humildad es más preferible que la arrogancia?¿Qué es la verdadera humildad? ¿La humildad es la esencia del carácter de Jesús?

Compórtense como lo hizo Cristo Jesús, el cual, siendo de condición divina no quiso hacer de ello ostentación, sino que se dejó de su grandeza, asumió la condición de siervo y se hizo semejante a los humanos. Y asumiendo la condición humana, se rebajó a sí mismo hasta morir por obediencia, y morir en una cruz.

Por eso, Dios lo exaltó soberanamente y lo otorgó el más excesivo de los nombres, para que todos los seres, en el cielo, en la tierra y en los infieles, caigan de rodillas ante el nombre de Jesús, y todos proclamen que Jesucristo es Señor, para gloria de Dios Padre” (Fil 2:5-11).

La entrega desinteresada es fundamentalmente importante para la vida cristiana. Para seguir a Jesús y servir a su pueblo, tenemos que abandonar nuestra forma de ser, reconocer nuestra condición de pecadores y nuestra insuficiencia como ministros del Evangelio para permitir que el Espíritu Santo nos haga de la fuerza para ser efectivamente testigos del poder sanador de un Dios amoroso y misericordioso.

Como el papa Francisco nos recuerda, en ninguna parte del Evangelio Jesús se exalta a sí mismo; su autoridad provenía de su humildad y no de proclamar con orgullo “yo soy el Mesías” o “yo soy el profeta”. De hecho, el Evangelio está repleto de ejemplos de los intentos de Jesús de reforzar su autoridad con sus logros, ya sea atribuyéndoseles al Padre o al pedirles a los beneficiarios de su sanación y perdón que “no se lo contaran a nadie” (a menudo sin mucho éxito).

La docilidad y la ternura, según explican el papa Francisco, son las dos características que definen la autoridad de Cristo Jesús. Era humilde y nos desafía a todos los que desean ser sus discípulos, a hacerlo mismo.

La humildad es un concepto difícil para nosotros porque nos han enseñado que es algo que degrada, que de alguna forma nos desvaloriza como personas. Nadie más alejado de la verdad. Con toda humildad, creemos que cada uno de nosotros está hecho a imagen y semejanza de Dios. Somos bendecidos por la gracia de Cristo quien nos libera de las ataduras del ego y nos empodera para obrar maravillas en su nombre.

La virtud de la humildad no nos minimiza sino que nos engrandece a través del reconocimiento de que Dios es la fuente de nuestra bondad, nuestra fuerza y nuestra capacidad para atender las necesidades de los demás, especialmente los pobres y los vulnerables.

Recemos para obtener la gracia de orar como el recaudador de impuestos en la parábola de Jesús: “Señor, ten compasión de mí, que soy un pecador y no de proclamar con orgullo”. No somos, ni debemos ser, imitadores de Dios que nos ayuda a recordar que lo bueno que hacemos no es producto de nuestros propios esfuerzos o nuestra rectitud, sino el resultado de la gracia de Dios obrando en nuestras vidas. †
November 1
Women’s Care Center, 4901 W. 86th St., Indianapolis.
First Friday Mass, 5 p.m., Father David Lawler presiding, optional tour of center to follow. Information: 317-829-6800, womencarecenter.org.

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. First Friday celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mass 5-45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, following Mass until 9 p.m., the Blessed Sacrament, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, 5:45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, 10 a.m.

November 2
St. Matthew the Apostle Church, 4100 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. All Soul’s Day Memorial Mass, 10 a.m. Information: 317-257-4297, bulletin@saintmatt.org.

St. Michael Church, 145 S. Michael Blvd., Brownsburg. First Saturday Marian Devotional Prayer Group, Mass, devotional prayers, rosary, 8 a.m. Information: 765-647-5462.

St. Malachy School Gymnasium, 7411 N. County Road 1000 E., Brownsburg. Altar Society Christmas Bazaar, 50 vendors, jewelry, candles, soups, decorations, crafts, chicken salad sandwiches, homemade chicken noodle dinners, desserts, free admission, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Information: 317-852-1195, jhussociety@gmail.com.

November 3
St. Martin de Porres Bilingual Mass, sponsored by the archdiocesan Black and Hispanic Catholic ministries, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson presiding, 6 p.m. with a feast to follow, bring dish to share. Information: Pearlette Springer, p.springer@archindy.org, 317-236-1474.

St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, 500 E. 42nd St., Indianapolis. Open house, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., serves pre-K-8th grades. Lighthouse Accredited. Information: 317-283-1518.

White Violet Center for Eco-Justice, 1 Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Teen Volunteer Opportunity, ages 12-18, sharing time and talent with people of every age and ability in our local communities. Opportunity/all Information: 317-852-3195, altarsociety@archindy.org.

November 4
St. Martha’s Church, 6131 N. Michigan Road, Indianapolis. St. Martin de Porres Bilingual Mass, sponsored by the archdiocesan Black and Hispanic Catholic ministries, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson presiding, 6 p.m. with a feast to follow, bring dish to share. Information: Pearlette Springer, p.springer@archindy.org, 317-236-1474.

Divorce and Beyond offered on Mondays from Nov. 11-Dec. 16 in Indianapolis

Divorce and Beyond, a peer ministry support group of the archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, will be offered at the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, starting at the Pleasant Run Parkway gate from 1:30-2:30 p.m. on Nov. 3.

This prayerful tour of the historic cemetery will include life stories of several people who are buried there. A plenary indulgence for souls in purgatory is possible with completion of other conditions. Registration is not required. For more information, call 317-636-4478 or e-mail info@holyroosmarynd.org.

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St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, 500 E. 42nd St., Indianapolis. Open house, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., serves pre-K-8th grades. Lighthouse Accredited. Information: 317-283-1518.

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Indulgence walk planned at historic Indianapolis Catholic cemetery on Nov. 3

Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish Knights of Columbus Santo Rosario Council #14449 and the Catholic Cemeteries Association will host an indulgence walk in Holy Cross and St. Joseph Cemetery, 2446 S. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, starting at the Pleasant Run Parkway gate from 1:30-2:30 p.m. on Nov. 3.

This prayerful tour of the historic cemetery will include life stories of several people who are buried there. A plenary indulgence for souls in purgatory is possible with completion of other conditions. Registration is not required. For more information, call 317-636-4478 or e-mail info@holyroosmarynd.org.
Blessed Virgin Mary helps us enter through the narrow gate

“In her role as mother of God and our mother, Mary nurtures and protects us. She argues on our behalf, even or especially when she has sinned and lost our way. “Mary is the mother,” Pope Francis says, “and a mother’s main concern is the health of her children. Our Lady guards our health … helps us grow, face life and be free.’”

Mary never turned away from the pain suffering in her own life or in the life of her Son. She did not pretend to understand why Jesus had to endure mockery, torture and an excruciatingly painful death on a cross. But she accepted God’s will and she did everything in her power to support and comfort Jesus as he suffered and died for us.

Mary suffered too, as only a mother could, but her suffering was offered up for the sake of her children. She faced life on its terms — and in so doing, she was set free.

Reflecting on the passage in St. Luke’s Gospel where Jesus is asked how many (or how few) people will be saved (Lk 13:22-24), Pope Francis observes that “the way to heaven is difficult and the gate to enter small, but Jesus’ mother, Mary, who herself never sinned, and through the narrow gate, will help those who ask.” This is what the Holy Father means when he says that “Mary is the gate of the heart of Jesus.” She shows us the way and then helps us to enter through the narrow gate.

In St. Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few (Mt 7:13-14).”

There is no easy road to heaven, no broad pathway or wide-open door. Too many obstacles stand in the way and the entrance is small: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate,” Jesus says, “for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter, but will not be strong enough” (Lk 13:24).

Jesus makes it clear that it is not a question of numbers. “There is no ‘closed number’ in Paradise! But it is a question of going through the right passage, which is there, for everyone, but it is narrow,” Pope Francis tells us. That’s why we should ask Mary and ask her example and ask her to help us along the way.

Jesus invites us to take personal responsibility, to imitate him and to empty ourselves of the material and spiritual burdens that make it difficult for us to face life and be free.

As the pope tells us, Jesus does not deceive people; he does not say that the way to heaven is a big, beautiful highway with a large door at the end, to not worry. “No, Jesus tells us things as they are: the passage is narrow.” And many who seek to enter God’s kingdom discover that they don’t have the capacity to make it through.

Mary our mother is determined to point the way and help us make it to heaven. If only we will turn to her and allow her to help us “to face life and be free.”

El rostro de la misericordia/Daniel Conway

“Pero la que ha ocurrido en la Virgen Madre de manera única, también nos sucede a nosotros en el plano espiritual cuando acogemos la Palabra de Dios con corazón bueno y sincero y la ponemos en práctica. Es como si Dios adquiriera cura en nuestro corazón. No tenemos que vivir en el tabique de divisiones, porque toma morada en nosotros, porque se transforma en nuestro cuerpo. No es fácil entender esto, pero, sí, es fácil sentirlo en el corazón.” (Papa Francisco)

Desde el comienzo de su pontificado, el papa Francisco ha destacado la función de la Santísima Virgen María como “una puerta que sigue exactamente la forma de Jesús: la puerta del corazón de Dios, corazón exigente, pero abierto a todos nosotros.”

Como puerta, María no nos muestra el camino hacia su hijo Jesús, sino que también intercede por nosotros y nos facilita la tarea de buscar y encontrarlo.

Según el Santo Padre, María “lo acogió con todo su corazón y lo siguió todos los días de su vida, aun cuando no entendía, aun cuando una espada ‘laceró su alma’.”

En su papel de madre de Dios y nuestra madre, María nos acoge y nos protege. Ella no da a entender, incluso, especialmente, cuando hemos pecado y hemos extraviado el camino. “María es la madre —dice el papa Francisco— y la preocupación perpetua de cada madre es la salud de sus hijos. … Nuestra Señora vela por nuestra salud … nos ayuda a crecer, a enfrentar la vida y a ser libres.”

María jamás le huyó al dolor y al sufrimiento, ni en su vida ni en la de su hijo. No fingía entender por qué Jesús tuvo que soportar burlas, torturas y una muerte atroz en una cruz, pero aceptó la voluntad de Dios e hizo todo lo que estuvo a su alcance para apoyar y consolar a Jesús mientras sufría y murió por nosotros.

María también sufrió, como solo una madre puede hacerlo, pero su sufrimiento fue una ofrenda para el bien de sus hijos. Se enfrentó a la vida en términos terrenales y al hacerlo, se liberó.

En una reflexión sobre el pasaje del Evangelio según san Lucas en el cual preguntan a Jesús cuántos serán salvados (Lc 13:22-24), el papa Francisco señala que “el camino al cielo es difícil y la puerta para entrar es estrecha, pero María, la madre de Jesús, quien también pasó por esa puerta estrecha, ayudará a quienes invoquen su auxilio.”

Ese se refiere el Santo Padre cuando dice que “María es la puerta amplia al reino del Señor.”

Ella nos muestra el camino y luego nos ayuda a entrar por la puerta estrecha. En el Evangelio según san Mateo, Jesús dice: “Entrén por la puerta estrecha. La puerta que conduce a la perdición es ancha, y el camino fácil, y muchos son los que pasan por ellos. En cambio, es estrecha la puerta y angosto el camino que llevan a la vida, y son pocos los que los encuentran.” (Mt 7:13-14).

No existe una vía fácil para llegar al cielo, no hay un sendero amplio ni una puerta ancha. Demasiados obstáculos se interponen y la entrada es pequeña. “Esfuérense en entrar por la puerta estrecha —dice Jesús— porque los que digan que muchos intentarán entrar, pero no podrán” (Lc 13:24).

Jesús deja claro que no es una cuestión de cifras. “No hay ‘número cerrado’ en el Paraíso. Se trata de atravesar desde ahora el paso correcto, que está ahí para todos, pero es estrecho,” nos advierte el papa Francisco. Por eso debemos acudir a María. Debemos seguir su ejemplo y pedirle que nos ayude por el camino.

Jesús nos invita a responsabilizarnos, a imitarlo y a despojarnos de las cargas materiales y espirituales que interfieren con nuestra capacidad para enfrentar la vida y ser libres.

Y tal como lo expresa el Papa: Jesús no engaña a nadie; no dice que el camino al cielo sea una autopista grande, hermosa con una puerta ancha al final, para desprocurarnos: [“Jesús] nos dice las cosas como son: el pasaje es estrecho.” Y muchos que buscan entrar en el reino del Señor descubren que no tienen una entrada fácil.

María, nuestra madre, está decidida a señalarles el camino y a ayudarnos a llegar al cielo, si tan solo acudimos a ella y dejamos que nos ayude a “enfrentar la vida y ser libres.”

(Daniel Conway es integrante del comité editorial de The Criterion.)

Pope criticizes cruelty of world marked by hunger, obesity, food waste

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Resolving the global crises of world hunger and malnutrition demands a shift away from a distorted approach to food and toward healthier lifestyles and just economic practices, Pope Francis said.

“We are, in fact, witnessing how food is ceasing to be a means of subsistence and becoming an avenue of personal destruction,” he said in his message to Qu Dongyu, general director of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to mark World Food Day on Oct. 16. World Food Day marks the date the FAO was founded in 1945 to address the causes of world hunger.

Pope Francis said he hoped the world day theme of 2019—“Our actions are our future: Healthy diets for a #ZeroHunger World”—will be a reminder of how many people continue to eat in an unhealthy way. “It is a cruel, unjust and paradoxical reality that, today, there is food for everyone, and yet too many people lack access to it, and that in some areas of the world food is wasted, discarded and consumed in excess, or destines to other purposes than nutrition,” he said.

“Escape from this spiral, we need to promote economic institutions that can offer the poor regular access to basic resources,” he said, citing his encyclical, “Laudato Sì,” on Care for Our Common Home.

The theme also points to “the distorted relationship between food and nutrition,” he said. Some 820 million people in the world suffer from hunger, “while almost 700 million are overweight, victims of improper dietary habits,” said Pope Francis.

Being overweight is not only a major health issue in developed countries, he said, but also in poorer areas where people may “eat little but increasingly poorly, because they accept models imported from developed areas.”

“Poor nutrition based on excess often results in illnesses, such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and degenerative diseases, and poor nutrition has seen an increasing number of deaths related to anorexia and bulimia, he said. A better understanding of food and its true purpose as well as “a conversion in way of living and acting” will aid in fighting hunger and malnutrition, the pope said.

“Nutritional disorders can only be combated by the cultivation of lifestyles inspired by gratitude for the gifts we have received and the adoption of a spirit of temperance, moderation, abstinence, self-control and solidarity,” he said. “By adopting such a lifestyle, we will grow in a fraternal solidarity that seeks the common good and avoids the individualism and egocentrism that serve only to generate hunger and social inequality,” he said. Pope Francis also highlighted the vital role of the family in continuing traditions of sustainable farming and the production of nutritious foods.”

(by Daniel Conway)
At catacombs, synod members pledge simplicity, closeness to poor

ROME (CNS)—More than a half century after a group of bishops at the Second Vatican Council made a solemn pledge to live a simple lifestyle close to their people, a group of participants from the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon signed a new pact in the Catacombs of Domitilla.

Cardinal Claudio Hummes, relator general of the synod, presided at an early morning Mass on Oct. 20 in the catacombs where he and several dozen synod participants signed the new “Pact of the Catacombs for the Common Home.”

The original Pact of the Catacombs was signed by 42 bishops on Nov. 16, 1965, in the Catacombs of Domitilla. Backing the martyred Christians buried in the catacombs and the martyrs of the Amazon, the signers of the new document promised to act as good stewards of the rainforest, to promote an “integral ecology” of care for people and for the Earth, “before the availability of prayer is the ability to do good, to make good use of praying in its fullness.”

They also promised to “recognize the living, breathing, bleeding reality of women,” and the sit-in, which was near the Vatican City, was intended to draw attention to the plight of women in a patriarchal society.

The new pact is intended to be a reminder to the world that the Church is not just a collection of priests and bishops, but a community of believers who are called to live out their faith in the world.

The new pact also recognizes the importance of the Amazon region, which is home to millions of people and is facing environmental challenges.

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Speakers: With political will, countries can meet needs of refugees

NEW YORK (CNS)—The plight of the world’s refugees will be solved by politics, not by appeals to conscience or awareness of the tremendous scope of the issue, said speakers at an Oct. 17 New York symposium on migration. “You move states by forcing them to act,” said T. Alexander Aleinikoff in his keynote address. “Stop calling this a humanitarian crisis. This is a totally manageable situation,” said Aleinikoff, director of the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility at The New School in New York. “There are 25 million refugees and 7 billion people in the world.”

He said if the political will is present, it is realistic to let “career civil servants deal with it.”

The daylong 2019 annual “Academic and Policy Symposium on Forced Migration, Protection and Border Control” was organized by the Center for Migration Studies. The center is a think tank and educational institute established by the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles, also known as Scalabrinians. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn told Catholic News Service (CNS) the conference underscored that “facts and the truth have to form our policies, and not myths and misinformation about immigration and its impacts.”

The bishop, a member of the center’s board of trustees, said: “We have to speak truth to power, understand the issues and get to people who make a difference and be advocates.”

Rick Towle, acting director of the New York office of the UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency, said the global system of refugee protection is based on two principles. First, refugees are an exception to state sovereignty. “Protection is based on two principles. First, refugees are an exception to state protection is based on two principles,” said the global system of refugee protection, he said.

Towle said, “Eighty-five percent of the 70 million refugees worldwide are not trying to escape their country. They are fleeing violence, persecution or human rights situations, most are in conflict zones or countries that have undergone a debt moratorium for refugee host countries. International organizations can offer a debt moratorium for refugees that allows governments to free up money for public services and recognizes the public good they provide.”

Cured mother: Newman events ‘experience of a thousand lifetimes’

LONDON (CNS)—The Chicago mother healed from a potentially lethal hemorrhage at the intercession of St. John Henry Newman has described his canonization as “the experience of a thousand lifetimes.”

Melissa Villalobos poses with her 5-year-old daughter, Gemma, at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on Oct. 12. The Chicago mother healed from a potentially lethal hemorrhage at the intercession of St. John Henry Newman has described his canonization as “the experience of a thousand lifetimes.”

Melissa Villalobos attended the Oct. 13 liturgy at the Vatican with her husband and their seven children, and together they carried the offertory gifts to Pope Francis, who blessed their youngest son, John Henry.

Villalobos said she met Gemma, 5, who was born by emergency C-section when her mother was having contractions. The baby was born with a partially detached placenta eight weeks before Villalobos was to give birth. She passed away on May 15, 2013, when she was in a pool of blood.

She had been diagnosed with a partially detached placenta eight weeks into her fifth pregnancy, and an ultrasound scan had also identified a blood clot on the fetal membrane.

Doctors could treat neither mother nor daughter and fully expected Villalobos to miscarry. They warned her also that her life might be in danger from a hemorrhage and that she had to be ready for “all emergency services at any time.”

She collapsed on her bathroom floor but could not call for help because she left her cellphone downstairs and, in desperation, she prayed: “Please, Cardinal Newman, make the bleeding stop.”

The flow stopped instantly and, during the following minutes she smelled a strong scent of roses on three separate occasions.

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WASHINGTON (CNS)—Religion “helps promote moral discipline within society” and “helps teach, train and habituate people to want what is good,” U.S. Attorney General William Barr told an audience at the University of Notre Dame Law School.

“Religion helps frame moral culture within society that instills and reinforces moral discipline,” he said, but “over the past 50 years religion has been under increasing attack” by secularists.

There has been a “steady erosion of our traditional Judeo-Christian moral system” and “a comprehensive effort to drive it from the public square,” he added.

He made the comments in an Oct. 11 address on religious liberty in America, which he called “an important priority” for the Trump administration and the Department of Justice.

Barr, a Catholic, spoke to the law school and Notre Dame’s de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture. A text of his prepared remarks was posted on the Justice Department website, www.justice.gov.

He said a new task force within the department meets regularly and includes representatives from its various entities, including the Solicitor General’s Office, the Civil Rights Division and the Office of Legal Counsel.

The group is alert to “cases or events around the country where states are misapplying the Establishment Clause in a way that discriminates against people of faith, or cases where states adopt laws that impinge upon the free exercise of religion,” Barr explained.

Today, he said, there is a “growing refusal to accommodate the free exercise of religion,” when “just 25 years ago, there was broad consensus in our society that our laws should accommodate religious belief.”

He pointed to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, called RFRA, which passed by Congress in a bipartisan vote in 1993.

From the founding of this country onward, Barr said, “there was strong consensus about the centrality of religious liberty in the United States.... The imperative of protecting religious freedom was not just a nod in the direction of piety. It reflects the Framers’ belief that religion was indispensable to sustaining our free system of government.”

The U.S. Constitution “provides for limited government, while leaving ‘the people’ broadly at liberty to pursue our lives both as individuals and through free associations,” he continued, adding that underpinning a free society and self-government was the Founding Fathers’ trust “in self-discipline and the virtue of the American people.”

“Self-government,” he said, did not mean “primarily the mechanics” of selecting a representative government, but “referred to the capacity of each individual to restrain and govern themselves.”

Religion promotes “the moral discipline and virtue needed to support free government” by first giving us “the right rules to live by,” Barr said.

As Christians, the Founders believed Judeo-Christian moral standards were “the ultimate utilitarian rules for human conduct,” he added.

“They are like God’s instruction manual for the best running of man and human society,” said Barr, adding that “no secular creed has emerged capable of performing the role of religion.”

“We are told we are living in a post-Christian era,” he continued. “But what has replaced the Judeo-Christian moral system? What is it that can fill the spiritual void in the hearts of the individual person? And what is a system of values that can sustain human social life?”

Secularists promote “human values,” he said, but “what undergirds these values? What commands our adherence to them? ... [They] are really nothing more than mere sentimentality, still drawing on the vapor trails of Christianity.”

He sees “an unmitting assault on religion and traditional values” taking place today, which he described as “organized destruction” of religious values through mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry and academia.

These venues “promote secular orthodoxy” and “drown out and silence opposing voices,” Barr said, adding that the “high-tech popular culture” distracts people from the moral chaos going on around them. But this constant connectivity offers “limitless ways of indulging all our physical appetites,” he added.

Society’s “self-corrective mechanisms” are being suppressed, according to Barr. This can be seen, for example, in safe injection sites being promoted as the answer to drug addiction and abortion promoted as the solution for sexual irresponsibility, he added.

“Christianity teaches a micro-morality,” Barr said. “We transform the world by focusing on our own personal morality and transformation,” he added.

“The new secular religion teaches macro-morality. One’s morality is not gauged by their private conduct, but rather on their commitment to political causes and collective action to address social problems.”

Religion has never been forced on nonbelievers in this country, Barr stated, but today “irreligion and secular values” are being forced on people of faith.

He said he considers the nation’s schools “ground zero” for the attacks on religion. He pointed to states like New Jersey requiring by law that public schools adopt an LGBT curriculum “that many feel is inconsistent with traditional Christian teaching.” In many of these states, parents who object on religious grounds to this instruction for their children cannot opt out, he noted.

He also raised concerns about the Archdiocese of Indianapolis being sued over the direction it gave to Catholic schools to not employ teachers in same-sex marriages because the example of those same-sex marriages would undermine the schools’ teaching on the Catholic view of marriage and complementarity between the sexes.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, every archdiocesan Catholic school and private Catholic school has been instructed to clearly state in its contracts and ministerial job descriptions that all ministers must convey and be supportive of all teachings of the Catholic Church.

“I do not mean to suggest that there is no hope for moral renewal in our country,” Barr said. “But we cannot sit back and just hope the pendulum is going to swing back toward sanity. “As Catholics,” he said, “we are committed to the Judeo-Christian values that have made this country great. We know that the first thing we have to do to promote renewal is to ensure that we are putting our principles into practice in our own personal lives.... It is hard to resist the constant seductions of our contemporary society. This is where we need grace, prayer and the help of our Church.”

He urged a greater emphasis be placed “on the moral education of our children,” called for promoting and supporting “authentic Catholic education at all levels,” and asked all to “be vigilant” to keep secularization from driving religious viewpoints from the public square and impeding “the free exercise of our faith.”

Barr sees ‘growing refusal’ to accommodate free exercise of religion
Faithful are called to proclaim the Gospel with boldness

By B. Kevin Brown

On a number of occasions during the past six and a half years, Pope Francis has called his listeners to live out the Gospel with “parrhesia.” “Parrhesia” is not a word that you hear every day. So why is Pope Francis using it, and what is he trying to communicate when does?

It is impossible to get inside the mind of Pope Francis to identify why he has chosen to use this word instead of others. But there are some clues both from history and the context of when Pope Francis uses the word that shed some light on why he might be encouraging us all to adopt a posture of “parrhesia” as we take up the Church’s mission in the world.

In ancient Greece, to speak with “parrhesia” was to speak with frankness and forthrightness.

To speak with “parrhesia” was to speak your mind in a way that neither hid your intentions nor sought to manipulate your hearer. If a person spoke with “parrhesia,” there was no doubt about what was being said. A person speaking this way does so openly, refusing to hide from a person he or she might be critiquing.

The Greek word “parrhesia” appears in the writings of the New Testament more than 30 times. There, its meaning is similar to how it was used in the writings of ancient Greece. But it takes on a distinctive Gospel character.

For example, in the Gospel of St. John, when Jesus speaks with “parrhesia,” he is not speaking figuratively. He is speaking plainly of the love of God and the demands that it makes on us as we try to communicate when does?

It still describes a way of speaking that is frank and not circuitous. But it also means speaking with boldness. It describes a way of living and speaking with confidence in the truth of the Gospel.

To speak and live with “parrhesia” is to do so with courage to respond to the Holy Spirit’s invitation to transform creation toward the kingdom of God, even in the face of opposition. Similarly, when Pope Francis uses the word, he is exhorting his listeners to speak boldly, to speak with courage, and to testify to the Gospel while doing so.

First, he often uses the word when inviting large gatherings of Church leaders, like the synod of bishops and last February’s meeting on the protection of minors in the Church at the Vatican, to engage authentically in synodal practices.

The word “synod” stems from the Greek word “synodos,” meaning to journey together.

Pope Francis has made it clear that he longs for the Church to engage in synodal practices—to discern together how the Church is called to respond to the Spirit and carry forward the Gospel as one body in mission to the world.

In these settings, Pope Francis is calling bishops and laity alike to speak boldly and courageously, even in the face of disagreement.

Importantly, this is not a call to engage in unproductive disagreement, like those who would criticize others behind the cloak of an anonymous letter or those who disappear after offering a word of critique.

To speak with “parrhesia” is to speak plainly and frankly, without fear of disagreement.

The pope, then, is exhorting the Church to allow disagreements over the ways it is called to carry forward the Gospel to be aired openly and with charity so that, together, through dialogue and prayer, the Church might discern how best to respond to the Spirit today.

Second, Pope Francis often uses the word when discussing the nature of missionary discipleship.

Especially when traveling, he calls the baptized whom he encounters to act with courage and boldness, even in the face of resistance from those whose privilege or power is threatened by Jesus’ word that the kingdom of God is good news for the poor and oppressed.

In this sense, the pope is calling the Church to act in ways that are similar to St. Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke the truth of the Gospel in the face of persecution and opposition without fear.

Early in his ministry as pope, Pope Francis reflected on the mission of Barnabas to the gentiles in a homily.

He stated, “Today let us think about the missionary nature of the Church: these disciples who took the initiative to go forth, and those who had the courage to proclaim Jesus to the Greeks, something which at that time was almost scandalous.

Let us ask the Lord for this ‘parrhesia,’ this apostolic fervor which impels us to move forward, as brothers and sisters, all of us, forward! Forward, bearing the name of Jesus.”

This encapsulates Pope Francis’ vision of cooperating with the Holy Spirit’s work through “parrhesia.” He is summoning the Church to proclaim the Gospel with boldness, as one body, journeying together in patient dialogue with one another and the Spirit, discerning how the kingdom of God might be built up in our midst.

(B. Kevin Brown received his doctorate in systematic theology from Boston College and teaches theology in the religious studies department at Gonzaga University, where he is also senior specialist for faculty and staff formation in the Office of Mission and Ministry. He is the editor of the Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America.)
Being a prison volunteer is a life-changing opportunity.

Locally, some 15 Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) volunteers have responded to Jesus’ invitation to visit him in prison—more specifically, in the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute. Many, though not all, of these PVS volunteers are Catholic.

PVS is a non-denominational organization founded in 1968 by two pacifist Quakers for the purpose of visiting imprisoned conscientious objectors. PVS quickly expanded into a national organization dedicated to caring for prisoners of all types. To this day, PVS remains the only international prison volunteer organization known to the United States authorized to visit all federal and military prisons.

Currently, more than 400 PVS volunteers make thousands of visits each year in 102 federal prisons and four military prisons across the nation.

Ninety-eight percent of these prisoners will eventually be released back into society. With a loving presence and the help of the outside world while incarcerated, PVS visitors provide a valuable contact, PVS visitors provide a valuable touchstone for these incarcerated individuals.

“Chosen the better part” (Lk 10:42).

Many adults I know also witness to their faith every day, even in the darkest moments, I have found that suicide is now the second leading cause of death among young people, especially those who don’t have regular contact, PVS visitors provide a valuable check-in.

Since the Gospel of Luke first told a story about her sister.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will inherit the land” (Mt 5:9).

In early October, a weekday reading of the archdiocese’s Corrections Advisory Committee.

You’re in the kitchen. The pasta water’s boiling, the salad needs tossing, the table needs setting. The guests have arrived, and you need to keep things popping. So isn’t your sister, the co-host? She’s discovered that the guest of honor is so fascinating that she’s taken off her apron and is sitting down close to him in the front room to hear all the conversation.


“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5). Family members embody this, when they’re stubborn in defense of an idea, or when the whole family is in an argument. They show humility in their relationship with each other. Sometimes, they can be stubborn in defense of an idea, or when the whole family is in an argument.

In families for individuals to have a laser-focused attitude toward life, they must be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted those who are the image and likeness of God. Those who have been spared the immediate trauma to be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted those who are the image and likeness of God. Those who have been spared the immediate trauma will inherit the land” (Mt 5:5). Family members embody this, when they’re stubborn in defense of an idea, or when the whole family is in an argument.

Mary, Jesus and his good friends, Martha and Mary, whose brother Lazarus Jesus is going to help with the dishes? “You are worried and distracted.”

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” (Mt 5:6). Today, many parents and grandparents are providing grandchildren with more material things, especially the latest digital device. That never happens, though. We always end up wanting what’s next. It is seeking to do God’s will for us who brings lasting satisfaction. When facing life’s problems, adults should show mercy to those who hurt us.

“The beatitudes are pathways to holiness for families.”

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“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be satisfied” (Mt 5:9).”

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The Sunday Readings
Sunday, October 27, 2019

Strach 35:12-14, 16-18
Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

The Book of Sirach provides the first Scriptural reading for Mass on this weekend. The book is part of that group of wisdom writings classified by scholars collectively as the wisdom literature. The wisdom literature developed through an intimate and very believable process. As conditions worsened in the Holy Land several centuries before Christ, many Jews emigrated. Probably many prospered economically in new places. Prosperity, however, came at a price. In new surroundings, paganism abounded. The riches and pleasures of the pagan culture were powerful attractions for the children of these Jewish transplants. Devout Jews and conscientious Jewish parents realized that they had to convince their youths and their less fervent Jewish neighbors of the worth of the ancient Hebrew religion. This literature was part of this process to persuade audiences that the Hebrew religion in itself was the summit of human wisdom, a bold claim in the Greek culture, in which human reason was the highest authority. With this overall objective, each of the wisdom books was composed in its own time and in the face of its own circumstances. Thus, it is important always to know the context in which a book was written, even if a similar purpose was the driving force, and paganism was the common concern.

It is easy, and not out of place, to imagine the conditions in which this particular work, the Book of Sirach, was composed. The message is clear. Sirach offers a picture of the God of Hebrew revelation as far above the tawdry shortcomings and schemes of human wisdom and as less than admirable traits of the pagan gods. God is perfect. Humans are not. It is the greatest wisdom possible. St. Paul’s Second Epistle to Timothy, who was a disciple of Paul, provides the second reading. Paul models Timothy the deep meaning of the Gospel and guided him in the process of spiritual development. The Apostle also ordained him a bishop. In this reading, Paul encourages Timothy to be true to the Lord. The great Apostle offers himself as an example. He has been imprisoned and mistreated for Christ. His way has been rocky and uphill, but he has remained loyal. St. Luke’s Gospel furnishes the final reading. Here again, Jesus presents the smug and insincere as being without God’s favor. A humble and unassuming man is God’s favorite.

The reading makes two points. It teaches that those who have heartfelt love for God will endure. Gaudy, outward appearances mean nothing. Good works must rise from genuine faith and love.

The Second reading echoes what already has been said in the first reading. God is perfectly just, and we desperately need him. Human reasoning and ability are inadequate.

Reflection

The Book of Sirach suggests a time and conditions very long ago. In reality, they are quite similar to circumstances met in life today, or any day. Humans always exaggerate their ability. They cannot admit their limitations despite all the proof for it. It is the result of pride. It is a byproduct of original sin.

Simply, God alone is almighty and truly wise. Realizing God’s majesty and human imperfections, it is obvious that God alone is the model of perfection. Earthly rewards are empty and fleeting. God alone provides the only reward. God is everything.

Anyone who seeks a reward other than in God, as the Pharisee pursued other ends in the story told by Luke, chases after phantoms. The humble man in the Gospel truly is wise, so he is humble. He receives the reward. He succeeds. He achieves.

Humility is an essential Christian virtue. It is not a denial of what we are. Rather, it expresses the deepest insight of who and what we are. We are limited, but blessedly, marvelously, miraculously, we may rely upon God’s guidance and strength.

Apostles who are members of religious orders (e.g., Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, etc.) profess a vow of poverty and own nothing; the houses they live in, the cars they drive, even the clothing they wear belong not to themselves but to the religious order. Diocesan (sometimes called “secular”) priests do not take this vow. Diocesan priests are ordained for a specific geographic region and usually work in parishes. Diocesan priests are given a salary (usually including room and board) and are expected to pay their own expenses—car, clothing, charitable gifts, etc.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops notes on its website that “it is already expected that diocesan priests will lead a life of simplicity consonant with the people they serve.”

Perhaps some numbers serve best to illustrate: I am a diocesan priest, now retired after 50 years of active ministry. My retirement income from the diocese is currently $1,900 per month, and my monthly Social Security amounts to about $1,200.

From this, I am expected to pay rental for an apartment, food expenses, taxes, automobile expenses and travel, as well as any donations to charity. (Retired priests, if they are healthy, often supplement their income by helping out with liturgies at local parishes, for which they receive a modest stipend.)

The Church’s Code of Canon Law states clearly that “clerics are to foster simplicity of life and are to refrain from all things that have a semblance of vanity” (§282.1).

I mentioned some years ago in this column that one of my heroes was Bishop Kenneth E. Untener of Saginaw, Mich., who passed away in 2004. He kept all his books in his small car and moved continually around his diocese, staying for a month at a time in each of his diocese’s parishes. To me, Bishop Untener was a great example of someone who modeled his life on Jesus Christ, who “had nowhere to rest his head” (Mt 8:20; Mk 9:5).

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfathordoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbus Circle Dir., Albany, New York 12203.)

Submit prose or poetry for faith column

The Criterion invites readers to submit original 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 with submissions.

Send material for consideration to “My Journey to God,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-3567 or e-mail to criterion@archindy.org.

Daily Readings

Monday, October 28
St. Simon, Apostle
St. Jude, Apostle
Ephesians 2:19-22
Psalm 19:2-5
Luke 6:12-16

Tuesday, October 29
Romans 8:18-25
Psalm 126:1b-6
Luke 13:18-21

Wednesday, October 30
Romans 8:26-30
Psalm 13:4-6

Thursday, October 31
Romans 8:31b-39
Psalm 109:21-22, 26-27, 30-31

Friday, November 1
Solemnity of All Saints
Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14
Psalm 24:1-4ab, 5-6
Psalm 2:1-2, 7-8
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12a

Saturday, November 2
The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day)
Wisdom 3:1-9
Psalm 15:1-5
Romans 5:5-11
or Romans 6:3-9
John 6:37-40

Sunday, November 3
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wisdom 11:22-12:2
Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14
2 Thessalonians 1:1-2, 2a
Luke 19:1-10

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LYONS, James B., Sr., 75, Christ the King, Indianapolis, Sept. 11. Father of Melissa McGrath and Jim Lyon. Brother of Mary Helen Quinn. Great-grandfather of five.


SAGEBAR, Carol A., 75, St. Bartholomew, Columbus, Sept. 28. Mother of Mary Ann Frederick. Sister of Nancy Wdaman. Grandmother of two.

Providence Sister Marie Alexis Geiger ministered in Catholic education for 50 years

Providence Sister Marie Alexis Geiger died on Oct. 14 at Mother Theodore Hall at Saint Francis in Oldenburg. She was 94. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Oct. 11 at the Motherhouse Chapel in Oldenburg. Burial followed at the sisters’ cemetery. Anna Evelyn Clements was born on June 2, 1925, in Columbus, Ky. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis on Sept. 8, 1945, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1951. Sister Francis Joan earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Marian University in Indianapolis and attended continuing education courses at Xavier University in Cincinnati and University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Ky. During 74 years as a Sister of St. Francis, Sister Francis Joan ministered as an educator for 48 years in Catholic schools in Indiana, Missouri and Ohio. In the archdiocese, she served at the former St. Francis de Sales School in Indianapolis from 1948-53, St. Michael School in Brookville from 1954-55 and at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg from 1988-92. She later served in pastoral care and in ministry at the motherhouse before retiring in 2008. Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036-0100.

Providence Sister Rita Vukovic served for 42 years at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School

Providence Sister Rita Vukovic, formerly Sister Mary Anselm, died on Oct. 5 at the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Oldenburg. She was 89. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Oct. 9 at the Motherhouse Chapel in Oldenburg. Burial followed at the sisters’ cemetery. Rita Marie Vukovic was born on April 6, 1930, in Dayton, Ohio. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis on Sept. 8, 1948, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1954. Sister Rita earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Marian University in Indianapolis and attended continuing education courses at Xavier University in Cincinnati and Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Mich. During 71 years as a Sister of St. Francis, Sister Rita ministered as an educator for 61 years in Catholic schools in Indiana and Ohio. In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at Our Lady of Lourdes School from 1951-54 and at St. Michael-St. Gabriel Archbishops School from 1959-61. She also served at Father Thomas Keecin Memorial High School from 1961-64 and St. Mary Academy from 1967-70. She is especially remembered for her 42 years of ministry at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School from 1970-2012. Sister Rita went on various adventures to support the school through fundraisers. She included her riding in a two-seater IndyCar race car at 175 miles per hour and flying in 2005 in a T-6 Texan Warbird, which was a single-engine military training aircraft used from World War II through the early 1970s. Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036-0100.
We also structure the rest of our program year around those sports so that there is an invitation made to go deeper. Whether joining a small group that we call Emmanuel Group, coming to a retreat or attending a night of eucharistic adoration that we call First Fridays, Intramurals allows an open door to a deepening relationship with Jesus and the Church that did not exist before we started the program.

Q. What are some upcoming programs and developments that are planned in young adult college campus ministry in the archdiocese?
A. “We are always asking. ‘What next?’
And each new year has brought new grace. We have grown tremendously over the last few years with 5,000 people coming through our programs. We want to make sure we do not rest on those gifts that the Lord has given us and that young adults are being accompanied and not just invited. For now, that means further investment in a vision for evangelization and discipleship.

Programmatically, that is taking place mainly through what we call Emmanuel Groups. These are small group Bible studies that serve as our most fruitful and intentional engagement with young adults. We have groups meeting all over the archdiocese in many different contexts. We also be expanding our efforts to see the efforts into our parishes.

One thing we are most excited about is the piloting and expansion of Deacon Young Adult Ministry. We are still in the planning and proposal stage, but we see the Lord making a way for us to serve parishes and young adults alike more effectively on a regional level.”

Q. You’re in your 10th year of being involved in young adult ministry in the archdiocese. During that time, you’ve gone from being single to getting married to now being a married father of three children. How has your own faith evolved through those changes, and how does your experience help you to assist young adults across the spectrum to grow in their faith?
A. “So much life has happened for me in these last 10 years. I went from being a transplant to Indianapolis to single and seeking, to married and now a father of three children. I then navigated parish life, led a small group, discerned my gifts and everything in-between. It has been a gift to do this alongside so many other young adults and use my story as a witness.

“On top of that, these 10 years have allowed me to build so many connections with young adults, priests and parish staff of the archdiocese. The benefit of being here so long is that I am able to know the culture of the archdiocese in an intimate way and to see a long-term vision of how we can grow this ministry. It has been an incredible season in my life, and I will be here until God tells me its time.”

(For more information about the archdiocese’s Young Adult and College Campus Ministry, visit the website, www.indycatholic.org.)†

Members of the archdiocesan Office of Young Adults and College Campus Ministry enjoy a tighter moment outside the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis. Pictured, from left, Madison Kissel, assistant director; Matt Faley, director; and Rebecca Koverit, event and volunteer coordinator. (Submitted photo)†
Church bell in Madison

The blessing of the new church bell at the former St. Michael Church in Madison is shown in this photo from March 19, 1911. The bell is wrapped in a white net. The pastor, with his back to the church wall, is Father Joseph Bauer. The other two priests to his right are Father George Widerin and Father Michael Guthneck. St. Michael Parish merged with other Madison area parishes to form Prince of Peace Parish in 1993. St. Michael Church is now operated as a historic landmark.

(Would you like to comment on or share information about this photo? Contact archdiocesan archivist Julie Motyka at 800-382-9836, ext. 1538, 317-236-1538; or by e-mail at jmotyka@archindy.org)

Pew: Number of ‘nones’ now tops Catholics in American society

WASHINGTON (CNS)—"Nones," those who profess no religious affiliation, are now the largest subgroup in American society, their numbers having grown in the past decade while the percentage of Catholics in the United States slipped over the past 10 years.

In a Pew Research Center "religious landscape" report issued on Oct. 17, nones have jumped from 17 percent of the adult population in 2009 to 26 percent in 2019. Catholics, meanwhile, have slipped from 23 percent in 2009 to 20 percent today.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church can no longer claim a majority of the nation’s Hispanic population. The figure dropped from 57 percent in 2009 to 47 percent in 2019, although the latter number still represents a plurality. The percentage of Hispanics who say they are unaffiliated climbed from 15 percent in 2009 to 23 percent in 2019, and those who say they are Protestant went up 1 percentage point from 23 percent to 24 percent.

Aid a number of setbacks for religionists outlined in the study, it did say 62 percent of those who profess Christianity say they attend services at the same rate they did in 2009—at least twice a month. Overall, 65 percent of respondents described themselves as Christians.

However, the study’s numbers also suggest that the overall number of Christians has dropped in the United States over the past decade, from 178 million in 2009 to about 167 million today, while the number of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated grew by close to 30 million.

Pew said that in the General Social Survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago—originally the National Opinion Research Center—the percentage of Catholics in the U.S. population peaked at 27 percent in the early 1970s, the early 1980s and the late 2000s, but slipped to 25 percent in the early 2010s. Protestants peaked at 64 percent in the late 1970s, but have either slipped or held steady every survey since to the current 48 percent in the late 2010s.

The Pew study’s other key findings include:

- The overall Protestant designation that accounted for 51 percent of the population a decade ago has sunk to 43 percent now. While the number of U.S. Protestants overall outpaces that of Catholics, there is no one Protestant denomination with more adherents than Catholicism.
- Even for those who fall into the “nones” category, there are different strains.
- The most significant rise was among those who espoused “nothing in particular” when it came to religious belief, up from 12 percent in 2009 to 17 percent in 2019, a jump of five percentage points.
- The number of self-described atheists doubled from 10 years ago, from 2 percent to 4 percent. Self-described agnostics moved up from 3 percent in 2009 to 5 percent today.
- Gregory A. Smith, associate director of research for Pew, said the results were distilled from 88 “political” polls conducted by phone over the past decade, with 168,000 Americans over the age of 18 reached. The margin of error for any given year of the past decade, he told Catholic News Service, was 0.7 to 1 percentage point.
- Each of those polls asked this question: What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?”
- Most, but not all, of the 88 polls also asked: “Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom or never?”
- The answer to the latter question also showed a shift over the past decade.
- In 2009, a majority of Americans, 52 percent, said they went to church at least once a month, while 47 percent said they did not. In 2019, those numbers are basically reversed, with only 45 percent saying they attend religious services at least once a month, and 54 percent saying they do not.
- Smith said the political polls ask respondents a lot of demographic details—including the two about religion—so they can identify trends within demographic groups. Many social scientists have pointed to politics as a factor behind these trends, showing an ongoing disaffection for both politics and religion, he added.
- The decline in the number who say they are Christian cut across every major demographic group; the smallest drop cited by Pew was 2 percent among the “silent generation,” those born between 1928 and 1945. Double-digit drops were recorded among both men (12 percent) and women (11 percent); women are less likely than men to describe themselves as nones, 23 percent vs. 30 percent, and more likely to go to religious services at least once a month, 30 percent to 40 percent.
- Other double-digit drops were recorded among whites (12 percent), blacks (11 percent) and Hispanics (10 percent); college graduates (13 percent) and those with less than a college education (11 percent); those living in the American Northeast (15 percent), South (12 percent) and Midwest (10 percent); and Democrats or those who lean Democratic (17 percent). The number of white Democrats who describe themselves as religious fell to under 50 percent for the first time in the 21st century, while black and Hispanic Democrats who profess religious adherence, though down over the decade, are both still above 70 percent.
- The density of Catholics in the Northeast, long considered a Catholic stronghold, dipped by 9 percent to 27 percent, being eclipsed by nones at 28 percent. The South, once considered a Protestant strongholds, fell 11 points, although, at 33 percent of the adult population, they still constitute a majority.
- Pew said there are as many millennials—those born between 1981 and 1996—who say they never attend religious services as there are who say they go at least once a week, both at 22 percent.

(Big photo released Oct. 17 can be found online at https://pewrsr.ch/2MmKOwq)