



The

Criterion

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Joyful Witness

Perspective helps us see ourselves, others in a new light, page 12.

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The gift of St. Joseph



The feast day of St. Joseph holds a special place in the family of Francis and Jody Hammans. Here, their daughter, Lori Hammans Tobin, holds a photo of the couple as she stands near a statue of St. Joseph in St. Joseph Church in Indianapolis. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

A daughter shares the story of a ‘miracle’ that forever connected a family to a saint

(Editor’s note: Pope Francis has proclaimed this year as the “Year of St. Joseph,” honoring him for his faithfulness to God, his dignity as a worker, and his love and devotion as a husband to Mary and as a foster father to Jesus. As the Solemnity of St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, nears on March 19, The Criterion is sharing the stories of how he has touched three families in the archdiocese.)

By John Shaughnessy

As she looked at some old family photos recently, Lori Hammans Tobin came across a handmade card that led her to

once again smile about “our family miracle that happened on St. Joseph’s feast day.”

The card reminded Tobin that the best gift of her childhood came in a phone call, a call that left her mother crying tears of joy, and she and her siblings dancing and clapping in delight.

It was a phone call about her father, Francis Hammans—a phone call on March 19, 1964—that would create a dramatic impact on their family, their parish and the larger community for years to come.

Four years earlier, in 1960, Francis Hammans was a young husband and father trying to make a good life for his family.

See ST. JOSEPH, page 8

Faith amid the ruins: Pope calls Iraqis to affirm kinship under one God

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis summarized his “pilgrimage of faith and penitence” to Iraq in a prayer:

“If God is the God of life—for so he is—then it is wrong for us to kill our brothers and sisters in his name.

“If God is the God of peace—for so he is—then it is wrong for us to wage war in his name.

“If God is the God of love—for so he is—then it is wrong for us to hate our brothers and sisters.”



Pope Francis

Pope Francis’ visit began on March 5 in Baghdad, where he met with government officials in the opulent presidential palace, once home to Saddam Hussein and then the headquarters of the U.S.-led coalition forces that invaded the country in 2003.

With the dictates of protocol handled in less than three hours, the pope moved to the heart of his pilgrimage: visiting places of

faith and suffering, bowing in tribute to the innocents who died and embracing survivors.

He put the blame for the death and

destruction squarely on the sinful human inclination to define some people as “us” and others as “them.”

That inclination, which all believers must resist, explains why he told government officials and civic leaders on March 5, “I come as a penitent, asking forgiveness of heaven and my brothers and sisters for so much destruction and cruelty. I come as a pilgrim of peace in the name of Christ, the prince of peace.”

During the trip, Pope Francis did not mention the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the government. And, while he spoke of “terrorism” and war in reference to the 2014-17 destruction wrought by

See IRAQ, page 15

Many Texas parishes to keep face masks and limit capacity even with mandate lifted throughout the state

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Many Catholic parishes in Texas will continue to ask parishioners to wear face masks and will limit capacity for Masses even though the state’s governor, Greg Abbott, announced on March 2 these pandemic restrictions would be lifted the following week.

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso said he has been getting a lot of questions after the governor’s announcement, wondering if it would affect parish coronavirus safety practices.

“The short answer is no!” he said in a March 4 statement, noting Abbott has often pointed out that “churches are free to exercise their religious liberty and set their own protocols.

See TEXAS, page 10



People in Robstown, Texas, receive the COVID-19 vaccine on Feb. 9. (CNS photo/Go Nakamura, Reuters)

Bishop Rhoades: Latest COVID-19 vaccine can be used in good conscience

WASHINGTON (CNS)—In a new video, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine reiterated that



Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine "can be used in good moral conscience."

"There's no moral need to turn down a vaccine, including the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is morally acceptable to use," Bishop

Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., said in a two-minute video posted on YouTube on March 4.

The bishop cited an earlier Vatican statement that "has made clear that all the COVID vaccines recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience."

He also repeated comments that he made in a March 2 statement in conjunction with Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Pro-Life Activities, that if a choice of vaccines is available "we recommend that you pick one with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines."

"Pfizer and Moderna's connection is more remote than that of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine," he said.

"What's most important is that people get vaccinated," Bishop Rhoades continued. "It can be an act of charity that serves the common good. At the same time, as we bishops have already done, it's really important for us to encourage development of vaccines that do not use abortion-derived cell lines. This is very important for the future."

The Johnson & Johnson Jansen one-shot COVID-19 is the third vaccine that has been authorized for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

In their original statement, the prelates concluded, that "while we should continue to insist that pharmaceutical companies stop using abortion-derived cell lines, given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm again that being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good."

In December, the prelates addressed concerns over what then were the newly approved BioNTech and Moderna vaccines because "an abortion-derived cell line was used for testing them," but "not used in their production." They noted then that cell lines used were derived from fetuses aborted in the 1970s.

However, they said on March 2, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine raises "additional moral concerns" because it was "developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines."

In their more recent statement, the bishops also quoted the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which judged that "when ethically

irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available ... it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process."

They added that "if one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna's vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson's."

Bishop Robert P. Deeley of Portland, Maine, added his voice on March 4 to those who concurred with the USCCB statement.

"When it is your turn to receive a vaccine, you can receive the one that is offered to you without moral reservation," he said in a March 4 statement.

"As Catholics we are called to serve humanity in caring for one another. Consider the fact that, during this pandemic, receiving a vaccine is not just for one's own health, but for the health and safety of those around you," Bishop Deeley said.

Other bishops also have weighed in on the issue.

Bishop Alfred A. Schlert of Allentown, Pa., cautioned that he believed the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine "is morally compromised ... and should not be accepted by Catholics if other choices are available."

He said in a brief statement in the March 4 issue of *The AD Times*, the diocesan newspaper, that other vaccines that have been developed are more morally acceptable.

The diocese cited the position of the USCCB about the vaccine in the report, saying that if a choice of vaccines was available, then the one that is least objectionable should be chosen.

In addition, four medical organizations on March 2 issued a statement on the availability of the various vaccines and conscience protection.

The medical organizations urged that individual conscience be respected when administering any of the vaccines.

Joining the American College of Pediatricians in the statement were the Catholic Medical Association, the Christian Medical and Dental Association and the National Association of Catholic Nurses.

The American College of Pediatricians is a separate entity from the larger American Academy of Pediatrics.

The statement noted that the coronavirus pandemic has challenged the U.S. for more than a year, and that "the availability of vaccines provides a sliver of hope, but also raises many questions."

"Issues our society must address include prioritizing equitable vaccine distribution and the potential for coercive mandates on vaccine use," the statement said.

The organizations stressed that the people facing the greatest medical risk and those directly involved in caring for ill people should be at the top of the list for being vaccinated. †



Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

March 13–24, 2021

March 13 – 9 a.m.

Day of Prayer with young adult discerners at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral Parish, Indianapolis

March 14 – 10:30 a.m.

Mass at St. Patrick Church, Salem

March 15 – 4:45 p.m.

Mass and dinner with catechetical leaders of Indiana at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, Indianapolis

March 16 – 9:45 a.m.

Visit at Bishop Chatard High School, Indianapolis

March 16 – 7 p.m.

Confirmation Mass for youths of St. Mary Parish in Indianapolis, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral

March 17 – 8:30 a.m.

Visit at Roncalli High School, Indianapolis

March 17 – 10 a.m.

Department Heads meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

March 18 – 10 a.m.

Employee Lenten Day of Reflection at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

March 18 – 3:30 p.m.

Catholic Community Foundation Pre-board meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

March 20 – 12 p.m.

Baptism at St. Francis Xavier Church, Mount Washington, Ky.

March 23 – 1 p.m.

Council of Priests meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

March 24 – 11 a.m.

Mass for Deceased Priest, Reverend John Beitans at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

Pope Francis taps Cardinal Tobin as member of Congregation for Bishops

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis has named Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, N.J., a member of the Congregation for Bishops, the office that advises the pope on the nomination of bishops around the world.

Cardinal Tobin, 68, takes the place left vacant by U.S. Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, retired archbishop of Washington, who turned 80 in November and automatically ceded his membership.

The congregation is led by Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, its prefect.

Nuncios, or Vatican ambassadors, around the world conduct the initial search for priests suitable for the office of bishop and forward their names to the congregation. Congregation members review the biographies of potential candidates and

the comments and recommendations collected by the nuncios before making their recommendations to the pope.

The congregation also advises the pope on the establishment of new dioceses or the consolidation of old ones; advises bishops' conferences on their work; coordinates the joint activities of military ordinaries around the world; and organizes the "ad limina" visits that bishops regularly make to the Vatican to report the status of their dioceses.

The congregation is tasked with supporting the work of bishops in their dioceses, a function regularly carried out with the review of reports prepared in conjunction with the "ad limina" visits. But it also is responsible for organizing apostolic visitations of dioceses where particular tensions or controversies have arisen. †

Abstinence from meat not required on March 19 due to Solemnity of St. Joseph

The Solemnity of St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is celebrated annually on March 19. This year, that happens to be on a Friday in Lent.

According to Church law, abstaining from meat is not required on a solemnity, including during Lent. Therefore, Catholics throughout the Church, including in central and southern Indiana, are not obligated to

abstain from meat on March 19.

Catholics in central and southern Indiana may want to receive a plenary indulgence on the Solemnity of St. Joseph this year, which falls in a year dedicated to the saint proclaimed last December by Pope Francis.

There are many ways to meet the necessary conditions to receive the indulgence. Learn more about it at yearofstjoseph.org/indulgences. †

NEWS FROM YOU!

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ICC offers tools for public advocacy at state, federal levels

By Victoria Arthur

While gearing up for a busy second half of the 2021 legislative session, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) is also giving



voice to important national issues and urging the faithful to do the same.

From COVID-19 relief and other federal legislation dominating headlines recently to ongoing debate over the death penalty, the ICC is staying engaged on matters that affect the common good and offering tools for people to influence the discussion at all levels of government.

“Advocacy is so important, and everyone can become involved in some way in shaping the outcome of critical issues,” said Angela Espada, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “People step forward to vote for all sorts of reasons, and that is absolutely essential. But we are called to be involved in the public forum more than once every four years.”

Staying informed is the first step, Espada emphasized, and one reliable



Alexander Mingus

resource is the new weekly podcast that she hosts along with Alexander Mingus, the associate director of the ICC. Each Friday, the two post their latest discussion highlighting the issues most important to the Catholic Church and calling for public awareness and engagement.

The podcast is accessible on the ICC website, www.indianacc.org, which also offers a wealth of other information and resources. This includes access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which is the principal communication vehicle of the ICC for updating the faithful on the Church’s social teachings and legislative priorities to advance the common good. Signing up for I-CAN is simple, and members receive weekly reports via e-mail that include a link to the latest ICC podcast.

“The ICC began podcasting at a time of booming popularity for this medium,” Mingus said. “Our brief I-CAN podcast episodes complement the written I-CAN

reports and give members of our network another way to digest our updates from the Indiana Statehouse. In addition, the conversational format gives listeners anecdotal information they might not get from simply reading the I-CAN reports.”

In its education and advocacy efforts, the ICC supports and amplifies the priorities and messages of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Mingus has direct experience working with this organization of current and retired bishops who speak out on matters of importance to American Catholics and seek to promote the common good. As a college student years ago majoring in political science and human rights studies, Mingus spent several months assigned to the USCCB in Washington, D.C. There, he met with legislators on Capitol Hill and witnessed how matters of faith can influence public debate and decision-making at all levels.

“After spending a summer as a USCCB intern, I was able to see the inner workings of the Church’s advocacy efforts at the federal level,” said Mingus, whose efforts primarily encompassed health care reform policy and advocating for the poor and vulnerable. “Our counterparts there provide fitting guidance for our engagement with national politics in light of the Church’s teachings. We are fortunate to have their guidance in the complex and confusing web of national policies.”

The USCCB also offers this guidance to the general public through its website, www.usccb.org, and its action center, www.votervoicenet.org/USCCB/home. There, the organization posts alerts and position statements on the most important national issues and legislation of the day.

A recent example is COVID-19 relief. Almost exactly one year after the coronavirus pandemic drastically altered life for all Americans, the U.S. Senate on March 6 approved President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. At press time, the U.S. House of Representatives—which earlier passed its own version of the legislation—was expected to vote on the Senate bill as well.

The USCCB urged passage of the relief package because it “addresses the needs of many vulnerable people related to the pandemic.” At the same time, the bishops lamented the lack of protections for the

who are listed as prisoners of war, or missing in action from designated past conflicts, from countries around the world.

Details regarding the transport of the priest’s remains and his final resting place are now being planned by the family.

Father Kapaun was known for risking his life on the battlefield during the Korean War to minister to the troops on the front lines. He was taken a prisoner of war in November 1950, enduring a brutal captivity where he continued to serve and bolster the morale of fellow prisoners. Father Kapaun died in a prison camp on May 23, 1951.

In a 2013 White House ceremony, he was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his heroic actions on the battlefield. It is the United States’ highest military honor.

In 1993, Father Kapaun was named a “Servant of God,” signifying that his cause for sainthood could officially begin. A thorough investigation into his life was conducted by the Diocese of Wichita and the details presented to the Vatican Congregation for Saints’ Causes in Rome, where his cause awaits review on the path to what the Wichita faithful hope will be his eventual beatification and canonization.

In general, two miracles through the intercession of the sainthood candidate must be verified; one miracle is needed for beatification and the second one for canonization.

(For more information on Father Kapaun’s story and his cause for canonization, visit www.frkapaun.org.) †



“In a recent poll, more than 60 percent of Americans felt it was time for the death penalty to be abolished. It’s important for the Catholic faithful to be involved in national conversations about important issues. We urge everyone to contact their state and federal representatives and make their voices heard.”

—Angela Espada, executive director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

unborn in the legislation.

“Unfortunately, unlike previous COVID relief bills, this bill appropriates billions of taxpayer dollars that are not subject to longstanding, bipartisan pro-life protections that are needed to prevent this funding from paying for abortions,” the bishops stated.

Promoting the sanctity of life is always at the forefront for both the USCCB and the ICC, and that includes efforts to abolish the death penalty. This is an issue that hits close to home for Hoosiers, as the United States Penitentiary in Terre Haute became the site of all federal executions as of 1993.

In 2020, the federal government reinstated the death penalty after an almost two-decade hiatus. Since July, 13 inmates have been executed by the U.S. government—all of them in Terre Haute.

In a December letter, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson of Indianapolis called for an end to capital punishment.

“The death penalty, far from resolving anything or providing ‘justice’ for victims, ultimately contributes to the perpetuation of a culture of death,” Archbishop Thompson wrote. “The urgency of this appeal is directed toward promoting a culture of life that takes into consideration the ultimate dignity and sacredness of

every person as well as society itself.

“I urge Catholics and all people of good will to join in the urgency of this call.”

Now, there are renewed efforts at the national level to do just as the U.S. bishops have been advocating. Congress is considering the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2021, which would end the death penalty at the federal level and require re-sentencing of those currently on death row.

“In a recent poll, more than 60 percent of Americans felt it was time for the death penalty to be abolished,” Espada said. “It’s important for the Catholic faithful to be involved in national conversations about important issues. We urge everyone to contact their state and federal representatives and make their voices heard.”

To follow priority legislation of the ICC, visit www.indianacc.org. This website includes access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church’s position on key issues. Those who sign up for I-CAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.

(Victoria Arthur, a member of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, is a correspondent for The Criterion.) †

Remains of Father Emil Kapaun, Korean War military chaplain, are identified

WICHITA, Kan. (CNS)—A U.S. government forensic team announced on March 4 it has identified the remains of



Fr. Emil Kapaun

Father Emil Kapaun, a priest of the Diocese of Wichita, who was an Army chaplain and died in a Chinese prisoner-of-war camp during the Korean War.

Father Kapaun, a native of Pilsen, Kan., who is a candidate for sainthood, was an U.S. Army Chaplain

in World War II and the Korean War.

“It was a joyful and exciting surprise for the Diocese of Wichita that Father Kapaun’s mortal remains were recovered after so many years, and we continue to look forward to his process of canonization in the future,” said Wichita Bishop Carl A. Kemme.

The U.S. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, known as the DPAA, made the announcement about the priest’s remains. The DPAA recently concluded Father Kapaun was among the unidentified soldiers buried in the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. Remains of many U.S. soldiers were moved from North Korean burial sites to Hawaii in the 1950s and the 1990s.

The DPAA is an agency within the U.S. Department of Defense whose mission is to recover United States military personnel



UNITED CATHOLIC APPEAL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1 WHAT IS THE UNITED CATHOLIC APPEAL?**
 The United Catholic Appeal is a unified effort in which all parishioners are asked to provide critical, financial support to archdiocesan ministries that serve thousands of people in need across central and southern Indiana.
- 2 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ME TO SUPPORT THE APPEAL?**
 Your participation helps those whose needs are the greatest - the poor, the vulnerable, those on the margins. It shows your commitment to Catholic education. It shows that you are fighting for the unborn. Your support says “thank you” to our retired priests who have given their lives in service to the Church. It affords counseling to children, people struggling with addiction, those who grieve, and helps strengthen struggling families. It affords homeless families hot meals and a safe place to rest. It says “we believe in you” to our seminarians who are answering the call to the priesthood. It helps prepare future deacons who serve our parishes. Your gift provides hope.
- 3 HOW DOES MY PARISH BENEFIT FROM THE APPEAL?**
 100% of gifts made to the United Catholic Appeal go to support archdiocesan programs and ministries which in turn provide services that no one parish can offer on its own.
- 4 IS IT BETTER TO MAKE A PLEDGE OR A ONE-TIME GIFT?**
 Making a pledge allows you to spread your gift over 12 months, making it easier for you to budget, and may also allow you to give a larger gift.
- 5 HOW DO I MAKE A PLEDGE TO THE UNITED CATHOLIC APPEAL?**
 You can make your pledge easily and securely online at www.archindy.org/UCA. Simply click on “Donate to UCA” in the top, right-hand corner and then follow the prompts. Questions? Call our office at (317) 236-1425. We are here to help!



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Editorial



Catholic Charities staff and volunteers in the Archdiocese of Washington distributed 800 boxes, like the one shown here, of nutritious grocery items and 800 family-size meals of bourbon-glazed chicken, mashed potatoes and broccoli in the parking lot of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on May 19, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. Almsgiving is donating money or goods and doing works of charity. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)

Can you increase your almsgiving this Lent?

It might be hard to believe, but we are already halfway through Lent. It's time to examine our consciences to see how well we are practicing the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

In his Lenten message this year, Pope Francis emphasized that our Lenten practices should not only promote individual conversion, but also should have an impact on others. An important way for this to happen is through our almsgiving.

Of the three Lenten practices, almsgiving might be the one many of us have the hardest time with. We find it relatively easier to, for example, add the saying of the Stations of the Cross to our regular prayer life, or give up alcohol or chocolate and abstain from meat on Fridays.

This year, in particular, is difficult because our lives are so controlled by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, though, when it comes to personal finances, people have been affected differently.

On one hand, many people are struggling badly because they have been unable to work. This probably isn't the year when they can, or should, be thinking about ways to increase their almsgiving. It's time for them to accept help wherever they can find it.

On the other hand, many other people have seen their personal finances improve, mainly because they have been unable to spend money as they did before the pandemic. We have been staying at home. Travel is down, eating out is rarer, and theaters and sports arenas have been closed—until recently. People who have been able to work at home haven't had commuting or outside-the-home meal expenses.

Then there are also those stimulus checks, or COVID relief checks. They were vitally important for some people, but we have heard of cases where recipients of the checks immediately sent the money to their favorite charities because they didn't think they had done anything to deserve the money.

If you are able to increase your almsgiving, where should you start? We suggest looking at your local parish first. Its expenses continue during the

pandemic, but contributions often do not. If you haven't contributed to your parish while you were unable to attend Mass there, perhaps you could now make up for that.

Next, we believe, should be organizations that help those who are hurting so badly. The agencies and offices of Catholic Charities would be at the top of that list. Among people served are the poor, the hungry, the homeless, pregnant women, the elderly, neglected children, and anyone else in need. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis has offices in Bloomington, Terre Haute, Tell City, New Albany and Indianapolis. David Bethuram, executive director of the Secretariat for Catholic Charities, keeps us informed about what some of the agencies are accomplishing in his monthly column on our "Perspectives" page.

There is also the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which provides food, clothing and furniture to individuals and families in need as well as training to help them break the cycle of poverty. The council in Indianapolis operates the largest food pantry in the Midwest. As reported on page 6 of last week's issue, councils in Bloomington, Brown County and Indianapolis are in great need of donated furniture and funds.

At the international level, we suggest beginning with Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' official international humanitarian agency that serves the poor and suffering people in countries throughout the world, or private organizations such as Food for the Poor and Cross Catholic Outreach, which are accomplishing so much in the fight against poverty.

We suggest that our readers take the pope's words to heart this Lent, prayerfully discover something they can give up, and contribute what they would have spent to a charity that serves the poor.

As Pope Francis has said on many occasions, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Through our almsgiving, may we use Lent to demonstrate our love for them.

—John F. Fink

Be Our Guest/Tony Magliano

Lent's radical call to each person and every nation

"Repent and believe in the Gospel"—the call we received from Christ on Ash Wednesday—is a radical call, the most important call we will ever receive.



It directs our attention to uprooting all that is sinful in our lives and to ever more fully live lives of love—for friend and foe alike—with a special emphasis on the vulnerable and poor. It's a radical call that is meant to be heard, reflected on, and acted upon beyond the season of Lent—and throughout all the seasons of our lives!

In the Gospel, the biblical word used for repent is the Greek word "metanoia"—a radical change of mind, heart, soul and action. It happens when one changes course and turns around to walk in the right direction—walking out of the darkness of our lives and into the light of Christ. *Metanoia* means a life-changing conversion. That's what Jesus is calling us to when he says "repent!"

Think of some of the great saints who deeply repented, who truly experienced a *metanoia*.

St. Paul did a complete about-face. He went from persecuting the followers of Christ, to championing their cause and suffering with them.

St. Augustine of Hippo turned from fleeting, unmarried sexual pleasure and unsatisfying philosophical pursuits to a totally fulfilling surrender to the will of God. In his famous autobiographical *Confessions*, he sums it all up so well: "You [God] have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

When you and I allow our heart to rest in God, we become a new creation, fully dedicated to advancing his kingdom. But this takes humility, honesty, selflessness, much prayer and hard work. True repentance (conversion) is not for the faint-hearted!

The renowned Catholic English writer G.K. Chesterton wrote, "Christianity has not been tried and

found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

And making it even more difficult, a life dedicated to listening to the Holy Spirit concerns itself not only with personal repentance/*metanoia*, but also with the conversion of the nation, that is, praying and working to change in our country what St. John Paul II called the "structures of sin"—everything from abortion to war—into structures of life, love, social justice and peace.

In this year's Lenten message, Pope Francis encouragingly writes, "To experience Lent with love means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned and fearful because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these days of deep uncertainty about the future, let us keep in mind the Lord's word to his Servant, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you'

[Is 43:1]. In our charity, may we speak words of reassurance and help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.

"Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society" (*Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, #187).

As one important concrete way of charity, please consider a selfless Lenten donation to the poorest of the poor. One organization to consider is Catholic Relief Services. Visit www.crs.org for more information.

Let us pray that the God of love, the God who is love, will transform all our gazes into gazes of charity, thus inspiring us to recognize the dignity of each poor person near and far, and to therefore do all in our power—as individuals and governments—to help lift our brothers and sisters out of poverty into the decent dignified conditions of life they deserve.

(Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated Catholic social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings, and can be reached at tmag6@comcast.net.) †

'When you and I allow our heart to rest in God, we become a new creation, fully dedicated to advancing his kingdom. But this takes humility, honesty, selflessness, much prayer and hard work. True repentance (conversion) is not for the faint-hearted!'

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are published in *The Criterion* as part of the newspaper's commitment to "the responsible exchange of freely-held and expressed opinion among the People of God" (*Communio et Progressio*, 116).

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

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit

letters from readers as necessary based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but, for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to "Letters to the Editor," *The Criterion*, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org. †



Christ the Cornerstone

Walk in the light of Christ and live in his truth

“Early and often did the Lord, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the Lord against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy” (2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23).

Sometimes we mistakenly imagine God as an angry, vengeful figure whose main objective is to scold his wayward children and punish sinners. This is not the God of love and mercy portrayed in the Old and New Testaments, but it’s an image that many people have come to accept as a picture of God.

As Christians, we have to work hard to replace this negative image with a much more positive and, we believe, accurate understanding of the God who is love. In fact, unless we acknowledge the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as generous, compassionate and forgiving, we cannot open our hearts to him, and it becomes difficult to experience the joy that comes from being united with him.

The Scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent contain vivid images

of God. In the first reading from the Second Book of Chronicles (2 Chr 36:14-16, 19-23), we learn that God has compassion for his chosen people even when they abuse his trust and inflame his anger toward them. Even in captivity in Babylon, the Lord does not abandon his unfaithful people. He rescues them and returns them to the land of promise.

The responsorial psalm (Ps 137) contains one of the most powerful lamentations in the Bible. God’s chosen people mourn the loss of their homeland. They long to return to Jerusalem, the holy city where God dwells among his people in peace and harmony. As they recall their homeland, they sing:

“By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.... If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten! May my tongue cleave to my palate if I remember you not, if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy” (Ps 137:1, 5, 6).

This song of Israel speaks for all of us. It gives voice to the longing we feel for God’s love and mercy as

symbolized by Jerusalem, the city of peace. Israel’s problems were the result of its people’s hardness of heart, but God did not abandon them—just as he remains faithful to us today.

In the second reading for this Sunday (Eph 2:4-10), St. Paul tells us that God is far from being spiteful or vindictive. The face of God that has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4) because of the great love he has for us. “Even when we were dead in our transgressions,” St. Paul says, we were given life with Christ who has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens ... that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-7).

This is the very opposite of a vengeful God. It is the action of a God who bends over backward to save us from ourselves and from the powers of darkness and death.

The reading from St. John’s Gospel (Jn 3:14-21) says it best: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so everyone who believes in him might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). This simple but extremely powerful

statement shows us the face of God. Our loving God intervenes in the mighty struggles between the forces of light and darkness that take place in our individual lives and in the world around us. And we learn from him that “whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God” (Jn 3:21).

In spite of the fact that we are sinners and, therefore, responsible for our sins’ harmful consequences, how could we ever believe the idea that our God is mean or punitive? Sacred Scripture is filled to overflowing with stories of God’s love and mercy. The testimony of countless saints and martyrs affirms that even when we, like the people of Israel, mock the messengers of God, despise his warnings and scoff at his prophets, God does not give up on us. Instead, he extends to us his forgiveness and his sanctifying grace to help us “come to the light” in Christ.

As we continue our Lenten journey to the joy of Easter, let’s turn to our loving God and ask him to satisfy our longings and calm our fears so that we can walk in the light of Christ and live in his truth. †



Cristo, la piedra angular

Caminemos en la luz de Cristo y vivamos en su verdad

“El señor, Dios de sus padres, les envió sus mensajeros persistentemente, porque tenía misericordia de su pueblo y de su morada. Pero ellos se burlaban de los mensajeros de Dios, despreciaban sus palabras y hacían escarnio de sus profetas, hasta que la ira del Señor estalló contra su pueblo, y ya no hubo remedio” (2 Cr 36:14-16, 19-23).

A veces nos imaginamos erróneamente a Dios como una figura colérica y vengativa cuyo principal objetivo es regañar a sus hijos descarriados y castigar a los pecadores. Ese no es el Dios del amor y la misericordia que se describe en el Antiguo y el Nuevo Testamento, pero es una ilustración que mucha gente ha llegado a aceptar como la imagen de Dios.

Como cristianos, tenemos que esforzarnos por sustituir esta imagen negativa por una visión mucho más positiva y, según creemos, precisa del Dios que es amor. De hecho, si no reconocemos al Dios Trino (Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo) como generoso, compasivo y perdonador, no podemos abrirle nuestro corazón, y se hace difícil experimentar la alegría que proviene de estar unidos a Él.

Las lecturas de las Escrituras del cuarto domingo de Cuaresma

contienen imágenes vívidas de Dios. En la primera lectura del Segundo Libro de las Crónicas (2 Cr 36:14-16, 19-23), descubrimos que Dios se apiada de su pueblo elegido, incluso cuando abusan de su confianza y encienden su ira. Aun en el cautiverio en Babilonia, el Señor no abandona a su pueblo infiel sino que los rescata y los devuelve a la tierra prometida.

El salmo responsorial (Sal 137) contiene una de las lamentaciones más poderosas de la Biblia. El pueblo elegido por Dios llora la pérdida de su patria; anhela volver a Jerusalén, la ciudad santa donde Dios habita entre su pueblo en paz y armonía. Mientras recuerdan su tierra natal, cantan:

“Junto a los ríos de Babilonia nos sentábamos y llorábamos acordándonos de Sion. Si me olvido de ti, oh Jerusalén, que mi mano derecha olvide su destreza. Mi lengua se pegue a mi paladar si no me acuerdo de ti, si no ensalzo a Jerusalén como principal motivo de mi alegría” (Sal 137:1, 5, 6).

Esta canción de Israel se hace eco de todos nosotros. Expresa el anhelo que sentimos por el amor y la misericordia de Dios, simbolizados por Jerusalén, la ciudad de la paz.

Los problemas de Israel fueron el resultado de la dureza de corazón de su pueblo, pero Dios no los abandonó, al igual que sigue siendo fiel a nosotros hoy.

En la segunda lectura de este domingo (Eph 2:4-10), san Pablo nos dice que el amor de Dios dista mucho de ser rencoroso o vengativo. El rostro de Dios que se nos ha revelado en la persona de Jesucristo es “rico en misericordia” (Eph 2:4) por el gran amor que nos tiene. “Aun estando nosotros muertos en delitos—afirma san Pablo—nos dio vida juntamente con Cristo. Y juntamente con Cristo Jesús, nos resucitó y nos hizo sentar en los lugares celestiales para mostrar en las edades venideras las superabundantes riquezas de su gracia, por su bondad hacia nosotros en Cristo Jesús” (Eph 2:5-7).

Esto es todo lo contrario a un Dios vengativo; es la obra de un Dios que se doblega para salvarnos de nosotros mismos y de los poderes de las tinieblas y de la muerte.

La lectura del Evangelio según san Juan (Jn 3:14-21) lo expresa mejor: “Porque de tal manera amó Dios al mundo, que ha dado a su Hijo unigénito para que todo aquel que en él cree no se pierda mas tenga vida eterna” (Jn 3:16). Esta afirmación, sencilla pero extremadamente

poderosa, nos muestra el rostro de Dios. Nuestro amoroso Dios interviene en las poderosas luchas entre las fuerzas de la luz y las tinieblas que tienen lugar en nuestras vidas individuales y en el mundo que nos rodea. Y aprendemos de Él que “el que hace la verdad viene a la luz para que sus obras sean manifiestas que son hechas en Dios” (Jn 3:21).

A pesar de que somos pecadores y, por lo tanto, responsables de las consecuencias dañinas de nuestros pecados, ¿cómo podríamos creer la idea de que nuestro Dios es mezquino o punitivo? Las Sagradas Escrituras están repletas de historias del amor y la misericordia de Dios. El testimonio de innumerables santos y mártires afirma que incluso cuando, al igual que el pueblo de Israel, nos burlamos de los mensajeros de Dios, despreciamos sus advertencias y nos mofamos de sus profetas, Dios no nos abandona. En cambio, nos extiende su perdón y su gracia santificante para ayudarnos a “salir a la luz” en Cristo.

Mientras continuamos nuestro viaje cuaresmal hacia la alegría de la Pascua, dirijámonos a nuestro amoroso Dios y pidámosle que satisfaga nuestros anhelos y calme nuestros temores para que podamos caminar en la luz de Cristo y vivir en su verdad. †

Events Calendar

For a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/events.

March 17

Calvary Mausoleum Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. **Monthly Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-784-4439 or www.catholiccemeteries.cc.

March 18

St. Joseph Church, 1401 S. Mickley Ave., Indianapolis. **Third Thursday Adoration**, interceding for women experiencing crisis pregnancy, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass at 5:45 p.m.

Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. **Monthly Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-574-8898 or www.catholiccemeteries.cc.

The Third Option virtual marriage crisis/enrichment class, "Listening Beyond the Words," 7-8 p.m., series offered most Thursdays, viewing all sessions recommended but not required, no registration needed, free. Go to carmelthirddoption.org/web, click on link at top of page. Information: or Keith Ingram, kingram@aicinvest.com or 317-324-8446.

March 18, 25

The Eucharist, Source and

Summit of Faith, through Old Testament and the Gospels, via Zoom, sponsored by St. Michael Parish, Greenfield, 1-2:30 p.m., final two of six stand-alone sessions, led by graduates of Guadalupe Bible College, free. Information and registration: Darlene Davis, ljdarlene@gmail.com.

March 19

St. Anthony of Padua Parish, 316 N. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. **Men's Club Annual Fish Fry**, 5-7:30 p.m., take out only, includes baked or fried fish, oysters and shrimp, two sides, adult dinners \$7.50-\$9.50, children's dinners \$3-\$5. Information: parish.office@stanthony-clarksville.com or 812-282-2290.

March 19-20

Planned Parenthood Abortion Center, 8590 Georgetown Road, Indianapolis. **Central Indiana Knights of Columbus All-Night Prayer Vigil for Life**, 7 p.m. Fri.-7 a.m. Sat., all invited to come pray at any time, Stations of the Cross 7 p.m., priest-led prayer 8-9 p.m. Information: Larry Kunkel, 317-223-4892 or life@indianakofc.org.

March 19, 26

Sacred Heart of Jesus

Church, 1530 Union Street, Indianapolis. **Praying the Stations with St. John XXIII**, 6:30 p.m., meditation, prayer, song. Information: 317-638-5551.

March 19, 26, April 2

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Knights of Columbus #15712, 523 S. Merrill St., Fortville. **Friday Night Lenten Fish Fry**, Fridays during Lent and Holy Week, 5 p.m. until supplies last, includes fish sandwich, steak fries, coleslaw, dessert, \$10. Information: kofc115712info@gmail.com or 317-485-5102.

March 24

Virtual Storm the Castle, sponsored by Bishop Simon Bruté Seminary, 5:30-7:30 p.m., for high school aged young men. Register: heargodscall.com. Information: 317-236-1490 or vocations@archindy.org.

March 25

The Third Option virtual marriage crisis/enrichment class, "Personality Difference," 7-8 p.m., series offered most Thursdays through May 20, viewing all sessions recommended but not required, no registration needed, free. Go to carmelthirddoption.org/web, click on link at

top of page. Information: carmelthirddoption.org/web, or Keith Ingram, kingram@aicinvest.com or 317-324-8446.

March 27

Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Catholic Church, 520 Stevens St., Indianapolis. **Faithful Citizens Rosary Walk**, 10:45-11:45 a.m., meet in front of church. Information: faithful.citizens2016@gmail.com.

April 2

Calvary Mausoleum Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. **Way of the Cross**, noon. Information: 317-784-4439 or www.catholiccemeteries.cc.

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**, Mass, 5:45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, following Mass until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-750-7309, msross1@hotmail.com.

April 3

John Paul II Parish, St. Paul Chapel, 216 Schellers Ave., Sellersburg. **First Saturday Marian**

Devotion, 8 a.m. rosary, meditation, prayer; 8:30 a.m. Mass with confessions prior. Information: 812-246-3522.

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

April 7

MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. **Solo Seniors**, 5 p.m., Catholic, educational, charitable and social singles—separated, widowed or divorced—age 50 and older, new members welcome, also call about regular Friday night dinner events. Information: 317-796-8605 or 317-243-0777.

April 8

The Third Option virtual marriage crisis/enrichment class, "Childhood Issues and Emotional Baggage," 7-8 p.m., series offered most Thursdays through May 20, viewing all sessions recommended but not required, no registration needed, free. Go to carmelthirddoption.org/web, click on link at top of page. Information: carmelthirddoption.org/web, or Keith Ingram, kingram@aicinvest.com or 317-324-8446. †

aicinvest.com or 317-324-8446.

April 14

Calvary Mausoleum Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. **Monthly Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-784-4439 or www.catholiccemeteries.cc.

April 15

St. Joseph Church, 1401 S. Mickley Ave., Indianapolis. **Third Thursday Adoration**, interceding for women experiencing crisis pregnancy, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass at 5:45 p.m.

Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. **Monthly Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-574-8898 or www.catholiccemeteries.cc.

The Third Option virtual marriage crisis/enrichment class, "Handling Anger Constructively," 7-8 p.m., series offered most Thursdays through May 20, viewing all sessions recommended but not required, no registration needed, free. Go to carmelthirddoption.org/web, click on link at top of page. Information: carmelthirddoption.org/web, or Keith Ingram, kingram@aicinvest.com or 317-324-8446. †

Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/retreats.

March 17, 24

Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, Pump House Studio, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. **Watercolor 101**, Wednesdays 9:30-1:30 a.m. or 6:30-8:30 p.m., learn basic watercolor techniques from Conventual Franciscan Father Vincent Petersen, open to all levels, bring watercolor paper, easels and drawing tables provided, watercolors available for purchase, \$20 per session. Registration: mountsaintfrancis.org/retreats or 812-923-8817.

March 18, 25

Lenten Letting Go Series, on Zoom, final two of six stand-alone, sponsored by Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 7-8:30 p.m., Judy Ribar presenting, \$20 per individual session. Registration: mountsaintfrancis.org/retreats or 812-923-8817.

Scriptures of Lent/Spring virtual study via Zoom

final two of six stand-alone sessions, offered by Providence Spirituality &

Conference Center, 6:15-7:45 p.m., \$5 per session, register by preceding Monday. Information, registration: 812-535-2952, provctr@spsmw.org, www.spsmw.org/event.

Lenten I AM Series: I AM the Good Shepherd, via Zoom final two of four stand-alone sessions, offered by Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Franciscan Sister Delouise Menges presenting, \$15 per session. Information and registration: center@oldenburgosf.com or oldenburgfranciscancenter.org/programs.html.

March 19-21

Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. **Sacred Rhythms of Prayer**, 9 a.m. Fri. - 1 p.m. Sun., Benedictine Sister Carol Falkner and Patty Moor facilitating, \$250 includes room and meals. Registration: www.benedictinn.org/retreats-programs. Information: benedictinn@benedictinn.org, 317-788-7581.

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat Center, 5353 East 56th St., Indianapolis. **On the Way to the Tomb**, 7 p.m. Fri.-1 p.m. Sun., Father James Farrell presenting, \$200 per person, \$400 per married couple, includes program, five meals, snacks, two overnight stays in private guestroom with private bathroom. Registration: www.archindy.org/fatima, 317-545-7681 or jburger@archindy.org.

March 23, 30

Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. **Combating Racism: A Spiritual Journey**, final two of six stand-alone sessions, 7-8:30 p.m., Mary Beth Riner presenting, \$25. Registration: www.benedictinn.org/retreats-programs. Information: benedictinn@benedictinn.org, 317-788-7581.

March 26

Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. **Painting with Padre**, last Friday

monthly through May, doors open 5:30 p.m., painting instruction from Conventual Franciscan Father Vincent Petersen 6-9 p.m., subject matter changes monthly, cheese and light snacks, bring your own beverage, \$40 per session. Registration:

mountsaintfrancis.org/retreats or 812-923-8817.

March 26-28

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat Center, 5353 East 56th St., Indianapolis. **Walking with Christ**, 7 p.m. Fri.-1 p.m. Sun., Father Stephen Banet

presenting, \$200 per person, \$400 per married couple, includes program, five meals, snacks and two overnight stays in private guestroom with private bathroom. Registration: www.archindy.org/fatima, 317-545-7681 or jburger@archindy.org. †

Send a card to a religious sister who is living in self-quarantine

Due to efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus, many non-cloistered religious sisters in the archdiocese have remained isolated in self-quarantine at their order's motherhouse or monastery for nearly a year.

Many of these women have served for years, even decades, in the archdiocese and elsewhere as teachers, administrators, health care providers, parish life coordinators and more.

To thank them for their service and to brighten their day, Catholics of central and southern Indiana are invited to send a note or a card to a religious sister at one of the three non-cloistered motherhouses and

monasteries located in the archdiocese:

- Sisters of St. Benedict: Our Lady of Grace Monastery, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove, IN, 46107-1197. For names and photos of the sisters, go to www.benedictine.com/meet-our-sisters.

- Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis: Convent of the Immaculate Conception, 22143 Main St., P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN, 47036-0100.

- Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN, 47876. For names and photos of the sisters, go to cutt.ly/SMOTWSisters. †

Common Threads to sponsor clothing event at St. Michael the Archangel Parish

Common Threads, the capstone project of a senior in the San Damiano Scholarship Program for Church Leadership through Marian University in Indianapolis, is sponsoring a clothing redistribution event at St. Michael the Archangel Parish, 3354 W. 30th St., in Indianapolis, on March 14 and 28 from noon-4 p.m. and on March 22 from 6-8:30 p.m.

The project currently has an inventory of more than 700 items,

primarily professional and seasonal, to be offered for free at the event.

Common Threads gathers new and gently used professional, casual and seasonal wear for men, women and children. Currently most in need are high-quality children's items, but potential donors are encouraged to inquire first by e-mail to verify what types of clothing are currently in demand.

For more information, e-mail commonthreads15@gmail.com. †

Former abortion doctor to speak at Indy 40 Days for Life closing rally

Former abortionist Dr. Haywood Robinson, now a staunch pro-life advocate, will speak at the Indianapolis 40 Days for Life closing rally on the public right of way in front of the Planned Parenthood abortion facility at 8590 Georgetown Road, in Indianapolis, at noon on March 26.

Robinson performed abortions for three years before a conversion experience revealed to him the truth about abortion. He has been involved in 40 Days for Life since its inception in 2004.

Participants are invited to bring items to support the rally's sponsor, Great Lakes Gabriel Project. Items

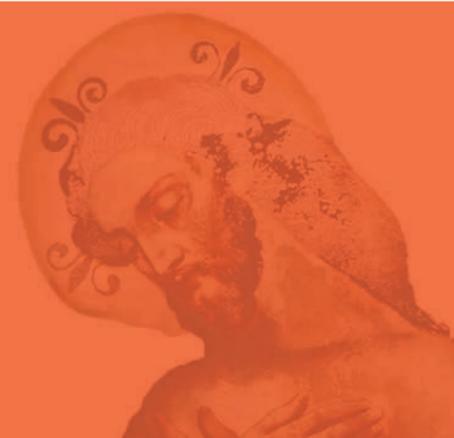
requested include gently used cribs (no drop-side) and crib mattresses and bedding, bassinets, playpens, breast pumps, strollers, highchairs, baby clothes up to size 2T, blankets, towels and baby toys. The following items are welcome—only if new: car seats, bottles and bottle accessories, and pacifiers, diapers in all sizes, and baby wipes. Financial donations are also welcome online at www.glproject.org.

Parking for the closing rally is available along Georgetown Road south of the Planned Parenthood facility. Do not park in the business complex or Women's Care Center lots. †



The Face of Mercy

By Daniel Conway



The core of Lent: 'asking where our hearts are directed'

"In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with 'speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn.' In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be 'willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference'" (Pope Francis' message for Lent; "Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship," #223-224).

Most people would agree that there is a crisis of kindness in the world today. Especially in political speech, but also in other areas of life, there is a strong tendency to demonize those who think or act differently than us. Civilized people can agree to disagree, but people who disdain all forms of difference—intellectual, cultural or political—can only call each other vulgar names.

During the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis has consistently called for a radical change in the way we speak to each other as sisters and brothers made in the image and

likeness of God. His 2020 encyclical "Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship" argues passionately for more human fraternity and solidarity among the world's peoples. "In order to give hope to others," the pope writes, "it is sometimes enough simply to be kind" (#224).

Where does kindness come from? It comes, of course, from the human heart, from a heart that is full of love and compassion. If our hearts are loving, it's much easier to be kind—even to people we dislike or disagree with. But if our hearts are unloving, closed to the concerns of others, we resist all attempts to establish common ground with the people who are not in our inner circle.

Lent is a time for examining and, if possible, redirecting our hearts. As Pope Francis said in his homily for Ash Wednesday, "Lent is not just about the little sacrifices we make, but about discerning where our hearts are directed. This is the core of Lent: asking where our hearts are directed."

Working to free our hearts from the attitudes, emotions and irrational fears that prevent us from being kind and compassionate toward others is a process

of spiritual renewal. It's the "journey of returning to God" that Pope Francis says is "a journey that involves our whole life, our entire being."

Returning to God means turning away from self and from the demands of our egos. It means allowing God's inexhaustible love and mercy to flood our hearts and wash away every impurity.

Lent is the season of healing and hope. It's a time when we acknowledge our sins and ask God to help us become kinder, more loving and hope-filled. As our Holy Father says:

"We have fallen down, like little children who constantly fall, toddlers who try to walk but keep falling and need, time and time again, to be picked up by their father. It is the Father's forgiveness that always sets us back on our feet. God's forgiveness—confession—is the first step on our return journey. ... All of us have deep-seated vices that we cannot uproot alone. All of us have paralyzing fears that we cannot overcome alone. We need to imitate that leper, who came back to Jesus and threw himself at his feet. We need Jesus' healing, we need to present our wounds to him and say: 'Jesus, I am in your

presence, with my sin, with my sorrows. You are the physician. You can set me free. Heal my heart.'"

The spiritual renewal that we pursue actively during Lent is what makes kindness and solidarity for all our sisters and brothers possible. "God points his finger at no one," Pope Francis says, "but rather opens his arms to embrace us." Our challenge is to be tender and loving toward others in the measure that God is kind and compassionate to us.

"In life's most painful wounds," the Holy Father assures us, "God awaits us with his infinite mercy. Because there, where we are most vulnerable, where we feel the most shame, he came to meet us. And having come to meet us, he now invites us to return to him, to rediscover the joy of being loved."

"Lent is a humble descent both inward and toward others," Pope Francis says. "It is about realizing that salvation is not an ascent to glory, but a descent in love."

This is where kindness comes from—the descent into love—and our world needs this kindness now more than ever.

(Daniel Conway is a member of The Criterion's editorial committee.) †

"Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God."

—Pope Francis, "Misericordiae Vultus" ("The Face of Mercy")



"Jesús de Nazaret con su palabra, con sus gestos y con toda su persona revela la misericordia de Dios."

—Papa Francisco, "Misericordiae Vultus" ("El rostro de la misericordia")

El rostro de la misericordia/Daniel Conway

El fundamento de la Cuaresma: 'preguntarnos hacia dónde está orientado el corazón'

"Que en la Cuaresma nos preocupemos cada vez más por 'decir palabras de aliento, que reconfortan, que fortalecen, que consuelan, que estimulan,' en lugar de 'palabras que humillan, que entristecen, que irritan, que desprecian.' Para dar esperanza a los demás, a veces basta simplemente con ser amable, con estar dispuestos a dejar 'a un lado sus ansiedades y urgencias para prestar atención, para regalar una sonrisa, para decir una palabra que estimule, para posibilitar un espacio de escucha en medio de tanta indiferencia'" (Mensaje del papa Francisco para la Cuaresma; Fratelli Tutti: Sobre la fraternidad y la amistad social, #223-224).

La mayoría estará de acuerdo en que existe una crisis de bondad en el mundo actual. Especialmente en el discurso político, pero también en otros ámbitos de la vida, existe una fuerte tendencia a demonizar a quienes piensan o actúan de forma diferente a nosotros. Las personas civilizadas pueden acordar estar en desacuerdo, pero aquellos que desprecian toda forma de diferencia— intelectual, cultural o política—solamente propinan insultos.

Durante el último año de la pandemia de la COVID-19, el papa Francisco ha pedido constantemente un cambio

radical en la forma de hablarnos como hermanas y hermanos hechos a imagen y semejanza de Dios. Su encíclica de 2020 titulada *Fratelli Tutti: Sobre la fraternidad y la amistad social* aboga con pasión por una mayor fraternidad y solidaridad humanas entre los pueblos del mundo. "Para dar esperanza a los demás— escribe el Papa— a veces basta simplemente con ser amable" (#224).

¿De dónde proviene la bondad? Proviene, por supuesto, del corazón humano, de un corazón lleno de amor y compasión. Si nuestro corazón rebosa de amor, es mucho más fácil ser amable, incluso con las personas que nos desagradan o con las que no estamos de acuerdo. Pero si nuestro corazón es poco cariñoso y está cerrado a las preocupaciones de los demás, nos resistimos a todo intento de establecer un terreno común con quienes no están en nuestro círculo íntimo.

La Cuaresma es un tiempo para examinar y, de ser posible, reorientar nuestros corazones. Tal como lo expresó el papa Francisco en su homilía del Miércoles de Ceniza, "la cuaresma no es hacer un ramillete espiritual, es discernir hacia dónde está orientado el corazón. Este es el centro de la cuaresma: ¿Hacia dónde está orientado mi corazón?"

Esforzarnos por liberar el corazón de

las actitudes, las emociones y los miedos irracionales que nos impiden ser amables y compasivos con los demás es un proceso de renovación espiritual. Es el "viaje de regreso a Dios" que el papa Francisco dice que "implica toda nuestra vida, todo nuestro ser." Regresar a Dios significa alejarse del "yo" y de las exigencias del ego; implica permitir que el amor y la misericordia inagotables de Dios inunden nuestros corazones y laven toda impureza.

La Cuaresma es la época de la sanación y la esperanza; es el momento en el que reconocemos nuestros pecados y pedimos a Dios que nos ayude a ser más amables, más cariñosos y llenos de esperanza. Tal como nuestro Santo Padre lo plantea:

"Hemos caído: somos hijos que caen continuamente, somos como niños pequeños que intentan caminar y caen al suelo, y siempre necesitan que su papá los vuelva a levantar. Es el perdón del Padre que vuelve a ponernos en pie: el perdón de Dios, la confesión, es el primer paso de nuestro viaje de regreso. [...] Todos tenemos vicios arraigados, solos no podemos extirparlos; todos tenemos miedos que nos paralizan, solos no podemos vencerlos. Necesitamos imitar a aquel leproso, que volvió a Jesús y se prostró a sus pies. Necesitamos la curación de Jesús, es necesario presentarle nuestras heridas y decirle: 'Jesús, estoy aquí

ante Ti, con mi pecado, con mis miserias. Tú eres el médico, Tú puedes liberarme. Sana mi corazón.'"

La renovación espiritual que perseguimos activamente durante la Cuaresma es lo que hace posible la bondad y la solidaridad con todos nuestros hermanos y hermanas. "Dios no nos señala con el dedo," dice el papa Francisco, "sino que abre los brazos de par en par." Nuestro reto es ser tiernos y amorosos con los demás en la medida en que Dios es amable y compasivo con nosotros.

"En los vacíos más dolorosos de la vida— asegura el Santo Padre— Dios nos espera con su misericordia infinita. Porque allí, donde somos más vulnerables, donde más nos avergonzamos, Él viene a nuestro encuentro. Y ahora que ha venido a nuestro encuentro, nos invita a regresar a Él, para volver a encontrar la alegría de ser amados."

"La cuaresma es un abajamiento humilde en nuestro interior y hacia los demás," señala el papa Francisco. "Es entender que la salvación no es una escalada hacia la gloria, sino un abajamiento por amor."

De ahí proviene la bondad, del abajamiento por amor, y nuestro mundo necesita esta bondad ahora más que nunca.

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

A young wife credits St. Joseph for a fun surprise

By John Shaughnessy

Janet Schnorr Tosick smiles every time she shares the story about the young wife who made an unusual plea to St. Joseph.

The story involves her in-laws, Dr. Bill and Monique Tosick, shortly after they were married in 1940.

At the time, the young couple was living in Boston, where Dr. Tosick was in the early years of his medical career.

“He rarely had a day off, but finally he had a day at home,” says Janet, their daughter-in-law. “Monique wanted to go to the beach, but they didn’t have enough money for gas. While taking laundry outside to hang on the clothesline, she prayed to St. Joseph, ‘Please help us, St. Joseph. Bill and I haven’t had a chance to do something fun for so long.’”

“As she hung clothes on the line, she felt a little flutter on her foot. There was a five-dollar bill.

“She ran to the neighbors’ houses to ask if anyone had lost money. No one had. Monique was so happy. She fixed a picnic lunch, and she and Bill spent the day at the beach.

“Monique told me this story years ago and said she always had faith in St. Joseph.”

Janet thought of that story again

when she was thrilled to learn that Pope Francis had dedicated this year to honor St. Joseph.

Besides the joyful story of her mother-in-law’s unusual plea, Janet viewed her in-laws’ marriage as a reflection of the approach that St. Joseph had toward the Blessed Mother—a union marked by love, dedication and faithfulness to God.

After World War II, the young couple moved to Indianapolis where Bill became a radiologist at Methodist Hospital. They had five children and were married 42 years before he died in 1982.

“Each morning, before work, Bill received holy Communion at St. Michael [the Archangel] Church in Indianapolis,” recalls Janet, a member of St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington. “Dr. Bill was a humble, kind, peaceful person. He and Monique were an example in their marriage and their deep faith.

“My husband was born [on] March 20, close to St. Joseph’s feast day. Monique and Bill named my husband Michael Joseph Tosick.”

The closeness to St. Joseph continues through the generations of the Tosick family.

“Our youngest son, Michael Joseph,



A painting of St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Christ Child adorns a wall outside the crypt chapel of the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad. The painting was created in the late 1990s by the late Benedictine Father Donald Walpole. (Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

told me [recently] the reasons he has always loved stories about St. Joseph,” Janet says. “It’s how he protected Mary and Jesus, and how he taught Jesus carpentry, even if Joseph knew Jesus would most likely do bigger things.

“I feel St. Joseph is watching over our family and our five grandsons. Just [thinking] about Bill and Monique and their early love story encourages me each day to ask St. Joseph for strength and guidance as a wife, mother and grandmother.” †

ST. JOSEPH

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He didn’t have a high school diploma because his father had died when he was 15, and he needed to go to work to help his mother and siblings.

Still, he had a strong work ethic and a deep sense of faith, being a faithful member of then-Holy Cross Parish on the near eastside of Indianapolis.

That faith and the family of Francis and his young wife, Jody, became severely tested when he was diagnosed in 1960 with tuberculosis—an infectious, life-threatening disease.

Francis was often in the hospital during the next four years, a period when Jody received several calls that he was about to die. At the same time, she struggled to keep their six children together. The children shared one bedroom, and relatives, friends and Catholic Charities helped the family, including providing food at Thanksgiving and presents at Christmas.

“I was only 5 at the time, but I know the six of us children were with our mom each night as she taught us to say the rosary,” recalls Tobin, who notes that her mother always told them that “God hears the voices of little children.”

As they prayed for their husband and father, he prayed too. He told God that he would find a way to serve him even more if he was allowed to live to provide for his family

By then, his lungs had collapsed, and he had kidney failure. His death seemed imminent. Then came the phone call.

“After a very long, four-year battle, the doctors couldn’t explain how, but our dad was pulling through,” Tobin recalls. “It was the amazing call on St. Joseph’s feast day in 1964. Our mom told us that our dad was finally coming home.”

His wife cried tears of joy. His children danced and clapped. And in the years to come, Francis Hammans kept his promise to dedicate his life even more to his family, his parish and his Indianapolis community.

A family legacy and another gift

“For the next 34 years, our dad was able to return to a full life, having two more children, 44 years of marriage and days filled with serving our Lord,” Tobin says.

At first, he did it by helping people whenever he could. Even though his family was on a shoestring budget after his recovery, he reached into the refrigerator for milk or bread whenever he learned that another family needed it.

Then, in 1968, he helped to start a food pantry for the poor at Holy Cross Parish. That effort led to making special food baskets for families in need at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Several hundred people lined up to take home grocery bags filled with turkey rolls, potatoes, corn, green beans, pies and bread. Cookies and candy canes topped off the bounty.

It became a 48-year holiday tradition involving as many as 500 volunteers and several generations of the Hammans family, a tradition that the family continued for about 20 years after Francis died in 1998.

Seventeen years later, there would be another defining moment for the family. It happened on March 19, 2015.

“We had an early morning text that day from our sister-in-law Kellie, wishing us all a ‘happy St. Joseph’s feast day’ before we began our day,” recalls Tobin, a member of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis. “It was a day we celebrated and remembered every year for the miracle of our dad returning to us.

“Later that morning, I received a phone call from St. Paul Hermitage saying that our mom was unexpectedly declining very rapidly, and that we should come to the Hermitage as soon as possible. On my drive over from work, I kept thinking and praying that nothing bad

would happen on St. Joseph’s feast day.

“Later, I realized this was yet another gift as Mom began her journey to heaven that day. She took her last breath two days later, and then she joined our heavenly Father and our dad.”

A continuing bond to a special saint

All these memories rushed back to Tobin when she recently came across the handmade card that everyone in the family had signed for Francis on March 19, 1994—to mark the 30th anniversary of his recovery.

She thought about the faith of her parents.

She thought about the love they had for each other and their family—which has now grown to more than 100 members, counting children, spouses, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She thought about their connections to St. Joseph and how her father seemed to follow that saint’s example of faithfulness to God, dignity as a worker, and love and devotion as a spouse and a parent.

It’s all part of the bond that continues for their family, Tobin says.

“Our family will always reflect, remember and honor our miracles that happened on St. Joseph’s feast day with the love, respect, faith and devotion our parents gave to each other—and to each of us.” †



A stained-glass window beneath the Church of St. Joseph in Nazareth, Israel, depicts the death of St. Joseph. (File photo by Natalie Hoefler)

As a parent, woman considers St. Joseph as ‘my hero’

By John Shaughnessy

When Pope Francis proclaimed this year as “The Year of St. Joseph,” Ivone Razzino thought of a conversation she had with her father when she was a child.

At the time, she didn’t think the Church focused enough on St. Joseph or talked about him much in Mass.

“I would ask my dad, ‘Why is there so little about him in the Scriptures? Wasn’t he important? Didn’t he take care of Mary and Jesus? Why is he not special?’”

“My dad would say, ‘I don’t know why they don’t talk about him. He was a good man. He had the privilege to be with Jesus and Mary and die in their arms. He is a saint to follow.’” She took those words to heart. Now a parent herself, she calls St. Joseph “my hero.”

“Years later, my dad gave me a picture of St. Joseph,” says Razzino, a member of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. “Now my son has it in his bedroom. So, guess what my son’s name is? Yes, you guessed it, his name is Joseph. I didn’t have to think that much about it.

“So when Pope Francis proclaimed



Ivone Razzino’s love and appreciation of St. Joseph led her to name her son after the saint. (Submitted photo)

this the ‘Year of St. Joseph,’ my heart was full of joy and excitement. I thought to myself, ‘He is getting some recognition.’”

Her appreciation of him has only grown.

“St. Joseph is a role model in every sense of the word. A man of prayer, trust, faith. I also think he was not as old as they always pictured him.

“I love St. Joseph.” †

Mental health needs grow dramatically amid pandemic

CLEVELAND (CNS)—The coronavirus pandemic has taken an emotional toll on Americans, with mental health professionals reporting they are getting more requests for assistance from people feeling helpless and experiencing anxiety and depression.

Inquiries are coming from people of all ages—young children, teenagers, the middle-aged and the elderly—as they struggle to cope with social isolation, financial hardship, online learning and uncertainty emerging because of the departure from the routines of pre-pandemic life.

The annual Gallup health and health care survey in November revealed that Americans' assessment of their mental health is at its lowest point since 2001—with 76% of respondents rating their mental health as good or excellent, down from 85% in 2019.

For many Americans, the challenges introduced by the pandemic mark the first time they have confronted mental illness. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has described the rising demand for mental health services as “the silent epidemic within the pandemic.”

“I don't think anybody anticipated what it was going to feel like to change so drastically as we did,” said Theresa Nguyen, vice president of research and innovation at Mental Health America, which advocates for people living with mental illness.

The organization reported that nearly 2.5 million people took its mental health screening in 2020, compared with 1 million who did so in 2019.

The professionals, including those at Catholic Charities agencies that offer counseling services, told Catholic News Service (CNS) that more people searching for help is a good thing because it shows that the stigma society holds about mental illness is waning.

Nationwide, Catholic Charities clinicians report higher numbers of people reaching out for help across all age groups.

Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis has seen an increase in the number of people requesting mental health therapy during the pandemic.

“People's emotional struggles have increased during COVID-19,” said David



David Bethuram

Bethuram, executive director of Catholic Charities in the archdiocese. “This includes all age groups: the elderly being isolated and lonely, families have become weary navigating social distancing, dealing with working virtually

and helping their children with school. In some cases, we have met with clients more than once a week to help them cope with their isolation.

“People of all ages are experiencing more anxiety and depression. This has been extremely difficult in our rural communities. We are now able to provide virtual sessions, but the internet is not as reliable in our rural communities. In our urban homes, many families or individuals don't have access to internet.

“The pandemic has been especially challenging for our clients who have

chronic mental health issues. The inability to live out their daily routines adds to their anxiety and depression.”

The trend nationally largely began in late summer, several months into the pandemic's run. Notably, adolescents, teenagers and young adults are seeking help at higher levels than other age groups.

“It has to do with isolation,” said Amy Shipman, director of counseling at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Children are feeling lonely because they are not interacting as closely with friends and classmates, leading to increased anxiety and more stress, she explained.

“A lot of parents are concerned about the isolation piece, the regression of their child being isolated, staying in their room more, not eating, not sleeping properly,” Shipman said.

Such situations have led parents to clinicians as well. On top of concerns for their own kids, many parents are facing economic difficulties because of a pandemic-induced job loss or added stress of having to directly oversee their children's online education and being unsure of how to do so.

“For a lot of people, the hard part was those transition periods and not knowing what to do next. It's fear of the unknown,” said Lisa Surrency, program director at Counseling Solutions at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

The Family Counseling Guidance Center of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Boston has seen its client base remain constant during the pandemic. Callie Armstrong, clinical director, said although overall numbers are stable, counselors are working with more adolescents and young adults.

“For adolescents, given they are in a stage of development where they're forming their identities, it's tricky when you're not around your peers, exploring the world, seeing what they like to do and not like to do,” she told CNS.

The more isolated people are, the more likely they are to experience anxiety and depression, explained Vicki Trujillo, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Gallup, N.M., which operates five regional offices that reach into northeast Arizona and primarily serve Native American communities.

Trujillo estimated the caseload for the agency's small mental health counseling staff has jumped 40% to 45% during the pandemic. In late February, new clients had to wait up to three weeks to meet a counselor.

“People are isolated because they don't live in town,” she said. “They were locked down so they couldn't come to town to get their needs [addressed]. And most of them are dealing with huge loss in their life because they've lost parents, their siblings, aunts, uncles. I had a man from one family that lost six members of his family. The loss is very great.”

As mental health needs have grown, professionals are watching for potential warnings of increased suicide.

Nationally, it is difficult to track real-time suicide statistics as monitoring systems are slow to report. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Monica Palmer, senior director of Clinical and Legal Services and Aimee Ryan, director of Social Work, at Catholic Charities in Oklahoma City, illustrate how they provide in-person counseling amid the coronavirus pandemic in this undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Oklahoma City)

currently has made available statistics only through 2019 and it will be late this year—nearly two years after the pandemic began—before experts will know if suicides rose during 2020.

Jill Harkavy-Friedman, vice president of research at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said the apparently stable level of suicide deaths is a “positive sign that more people are reaching out for help” during the pandemic.

She said federal, state and local officials are recognizing that addressing mental health needs is as important as addressing the other social inequalities that the pandemic has heightened.

Friedman noted how more money allocated in pandemic relief measures is flowing to reinvigorate community mental health centers. Still, she called for broader investment in such services.

Professionals such as Friedman said the time has come for America to prioritize mental health like it has traditional health care. They called for the federal government to spearhead widespread investments in mental health and substance use services.

Such services have received some attention under the three pandemic relief measures adopted by Congress and signed into law. Most recently, \$4.25 billion was included in the pandemic relief package approved in December. Another \$4 billion is included in the \$1.9 trillion aid package currently being debated in Congress.

Chuck Ingoglia, president of the National Council for Behavioral Health, which represents more than 3,300 treatment organizations, said sustained federal support for mental health services is necessary as the country emerges from the pandemic.

“One-time investments are good. No one is going to say ‘No’ to that. But it doesn't lead to increased capacity and long-term effectiveness,” Ingoglia told CNS.

“It shouldn't matter where you live. If you live in Birmingham, Mich., or Birmingham, Ala., if you have a mental health or substance use disorder there are

certain services you should get,” he said.

Ingoglia was one of 14 top officials of the nation's leading mental health advocacy and professional associations who announced in December the formation of a coalition to engage with the federal government, state governors and local officials.

They introduced a “road map” to address mental health needs as a way to help the country weather the pandemic.

The plan encompasses seven policy areas including the importance of early identification and prevention; leveling inequalities in access to care; rapid deployment of emergency crisis response and suicide prevention; integrating mental health care with traditional health care; diversifying the mental health care workforce, peer support and community-based programs; and achieving parity in payment by health plans for services.

Mary Giliberti, executive vice president of Mental Health America, said the integration of telehealth services for mental health needs has played a major role in allowing more people to access the counseling they need. She said such access must continue, not be reduced, in the future.

Like traditional health care, which has integrated preventative care as a necessity, the prevention of mental illness is just as important, Giliberti said. She also urged the adoption of policies that find mental health services becoming available to children in school.

“COVID has made it clear that everybody has mental health and that these needs are part of overall health,” she said. “We continue to make the case that there is no health without mental health.”

(If you or someone you know needs help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255). You can also text a crisis counselor by messaging the Crisis Text Line at 741741. The National Alliance for Mental Illness HelpLine can be reached Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time at 800-950-NAMI (6264) or info@nami.org.) †

Doctors seek permanent relief from mandate to do transgender surgeries

NEW ORLEANS (CNS)—Attorneys for doctors and hospitals argued in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit on March 3 that they shouldn't be forced to perform gender-transition surgeries required under the Affordable Care Act, stressing this is an issue of conscience.

The case focuses on a 2016 regulation issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requiring doctors to perform these procedures in children and adults or be held liable for discrimination.

After the rule was first issued, Becket, a religious liberty law firm, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Texas, saying the rule violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of Franciscan Alliance, a religious hospital network serving Indiana and Illinois that now goes by the name Franciscan Health, and the

Christian Medical and Dental Associations. The states of Texas, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska and Wisconsin also joined in the suit.

Two federal courts in 2016 placed an injunction on the mandate. Two other federal district court judges also ruled against the mandate in 2019 and 2020. However, the courts didn't issue a permanent injunction against HHS to prevent it from enforcing this rule in the future, which the group of doctors and hospitals were seeking on March 3 before the 5th Circuit, which is based in New Orleans.

“Medical decisions related to gender transition have serious implications, and it is clearly in patients' best interests to ensure that doctors are able to serve in keeping with their consciences and their medical judgment,” said Luke Goodrich, a senior counsel at Becket.

“Government bureaucrats in Washington who want to force doctors to perform controversial, experimental

procedures are putting children in harm's way,” he said in a statement.

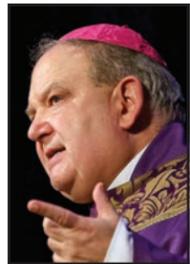
He also said the rule “undermines the federal government's own medical experts' advice,” and that “politicians and activists are trying to force private doctors, on pain of severe punishment, to perform controversial procedures that can be deeply harmful to patients.”

In a tweet on March 3, Goodrich said the court “asked the government's attorney point blank: Does the new administration have plans to go after these religious doctors and hospitals? And the government wouldn't answer,” which he said, “underscores why plaintiffs need full protection.”

He also tweeted he expects the court “to protect doctors' consciences and respect their medical expertise. Doing so not only aligns with the law and medical research, but also ensures the best care for patients.” †

Minnesota faith leaders pray for peace, justice during Floyd trial

MINNEAPOLIS (CNS)—Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis prayed on March 7 for peace and justice in the upcoming trial of a white former city police officer in death of George Floyd, an African American, while in police custody.



Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda

He gathered with more than 100 other faith leaders in a downtown Minneapolis plaza. “Loving God, you are the source of all that is good in our lives,” Archbishop Hebda said in the gathering’s opening prayer. “And so, we come to you with grateful hearts, grateful for the gifts that you’ve bestowed upon those that are gathered here. Grateful for the plans that you have for our cities. Grateful for the way in which you are going to bless us beyond anything that we can imagine. “We come to you today as a people who thirst for justice, but we hunger as well for peace.”

Jury selection began on March 9 in the murder trial of the former officer, Derek Chauvin.

He has pleaded not guilty to two charges—second-degree unintentional murder and second-degree manslaughter. A third charge of third-degree murder was dismissed in October.

With security fencing as a backdrop at the North Plaza of the Hennepin County

Government Center, where Chauvin’s trial will be held, and with a sign that read “Pray for MN” behind the podium and loudspeakers, the gathering of faith leaders was organized under tension felt across the Twin Cities.

Floyd’s May 25 arrest, part of which was captured on video by a bystander and shared with social media, sparked protests and riots across the Twin Cities and around the country.

Chauvin was shown during the arrest putting his knee on Floyd’s neck for nearly nine minutes as Floyd, handcuffed and face down on the ground, begged to breathe and then became unresponsive. He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

Floyd had been accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 to buy cigarettes.

Chauvin was fired after the incident. Three of his colleagues also were fired and they face a joint trial on Aug. 23 on charges of aiding and abetting second-degree murder and manslaughter. All four



Women embrace during a protest outside Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis on May 29, 2020, following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed African American man whose neck was pinned to the ground by police for more than eight minutes before he was taken to a hospital. (CNS photo/Eric Miller, Reuters)

defendants are out on bond.

In addition to the prayer gathering, Archbishop Hebda released a video and statement on March 5 asking for prayers throughout Chauvin’s trial.

“Whether you can take 30 seconds or 30 minutes, let us commit to praying each day for peace in our communities,

peace for the Floyd family, and peace for our first responder sisters and brothers working to protect us. Please join me as well in praying for an end to the scourge of racism in our country,” the archbishop said in the video and in his statement, both of which are on the archdiocese’s website, www.archspm.org. †

TEXAS

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“The protocols we have established were intended to collaborate with state and local practices, but were not undertaken under the direction of these entities,” Bishop Seitz said.

He stressed that the Catholic parishes in El Paso County “will not be making any changes at the present time to the protocols we have presently set in place. For the time being, churches will be limited to a maximum of 25% of their capacity. Social distancing and masks will be required in all Church facilities.”

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves similarly announced on March 2 he was lifting that state’s mask mandate, effective the next day, and that businesses would be able to operate at full capacity. Dozens of other states have loosened restrictions on mask requirements or never had them in effect.

Texas has had the mask mandate since July and is now the largest state not to have this protocol in place. Abbott announced on Twitter on March 2: “I just announced Texas is OPEN 100%. EVERYTHING. I also ended the statewide mask mandate.” He went on to cite lower COVID-19 hospitalizations and declining numbers of infections.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s top infectious disease expert, has called the Mississippi and Texas orders “ill-advised,” particularly in light of plateauing infection numbers.

And Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), also warned against these actions. In a White House briefing on March 1, she

said: “We stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained,” if restrictions are loosened at a time when there are emerging coronavirus variants.

Bishop Seitz said that even though the number of COVID-19 cases has decreased in the El Paso region, the area still has the highest percentage of hospitalizations due to the coronavirus than any larger city in Texas. He said there are still deaths related to COVID-19 and that diocesan priests continue to report calls from families with loved ones suffering from the virus.

Due to the decrease in COVID-19 cases, the diocese has begun celebrating funeral rites and weddings again. Diocesan officials also have been encouraged by the number of people who have received the COVID-19 vaccine, but the bishop said the community is “not anywhere near a level that experts refer to as ‘herd immunity’ and we will not reach that level for some time.” But he expressed hope that day would come soon and that “as progress continues, God willing, we will soon be able to relax these limitations. For the time being, however, we must stay the course for the good of all the members of the Church of El Paso and our community as well.”

In a pastoral letter issued on March 4, Bishop Michael F. Olson of Fort Worth, Texas, said that after consultation with diocesan priests, civic officials, members of the laity, and medical and health professionals, he decided the diocese should keep its safety protocols in place.

The protocols have included wearing masks, practicing social distancing, receiving Communion only in the hand, and the frequent and regular use of sanitizing and hand washing.

Bishop Olson wrote that it is “our Christian responsibility to maintain our concern for others, especially those most vulnerable so that we attend Mass safely and contribute to the common good of our parishes and the larger community of our towns, counties and state.”

He also stressed the diocese is gradually moving to a time when it can “more safely relax our restrictions and protocols as hospitalizations decrease and people are immunized.”

He said the Church is not moving “toward a modern sense of subservience to the civil government nor toward an equally contemporary disposition of self-reliance and autonomy—negligent of our natural responsibilities in charity and justice toward God and our neighbor.”

Similarly, Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of

San Antonio, in a March 4 statement, said he determined, after reviewing the governor’s order and getting advice from health authorities and local civic officials, “that all of the safety measures in place at the current time are to be continued throughout the Archdiocese of San Antonio until further notice.”

He said the use of face masks, along with social distancing and regular hand-washing and sanitizing procedures “have been effective in keeping us safe. These will not be changed at this time.” He also urged pastors to continue to livestream Masses.

A March 5 statement from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston likewise said archdiocesan officials have had a number of meetings about the governor’s order and determined that to best “protect the most vulnerable among us,” they would keep current protocols “in place until further notice, including the requirement for face coverings at Mass and other liturgical celebrations.”

It also said protocols for archdiocesan Catholic schools will remain in place through the end of the academic year.

In a pastoral letter to Catholic in the Diocese of Austin, Bishop Joe S. Vasquez also said that the “temporary protocols for the celebration of the sacraments in the Diocese of Austin remain in effect.”

In his March 5 letter, he said as more people are vaccinated, the diocese may be able to eventually “safely modify the protocols, giving more freedom at our liturgies and parish activities.” But for now, he asked diocesan Catholics to “stay the course in preparation for the time when this pandemic is no longer dangerous to the health of society.”

Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler, Texas, is taking a different approach. In a March 3 statement, he said that in light of the governor’s announcement, he was lifting the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation effective on March 10, except for those who are sick, at a high-risk for COVID-19, pregnant, caring for the sick or homebound or have a “significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.”

He said pastors could open additional pews in churches, but should still make sure social distancing is in place between households.

Regarding face masks, he said: “While there is no requirement to wear masks, and it is an individual choice, I encourage all to continue to follow the recommendations of the CDC.”

He also said parishes may make holy water, hymnals, and missalettes available, stressing that holy water should be changed, and the fonts cleaned frequently. Holy Communion should continue to only be in the form of bread, not wine, for the congregation, and parish social events, classes, and other activities are permitted if they follow CDC guidelines.

In their statements, the bishops urged prayers for the losses of the past year and for continued healing.

Bishop Seitz urged diocesan Catholics to “continue to pray for all those presently suffering from this insidious virus, and for all our loved ones who have died in this year of pandemic.” †



People pray at the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Dallas on Aug. 7, 2019. Despite Gov. Greg Abbott’s lifting of pandemic restrictions, many Catholic parishes in Texas will continue to ask parishioners to wear face masks and limit capacity for Masses. (CNS photo/Jenna Teter, *The Texas Catholic*)

Faith *Alive!*

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Giving alms manifests how we are created in the image of God

By Br. Brendan Gottschall, S.J.

St. Ignatius of Loyola once said, “Love ought to show itself more in deeds rather than words.”

One of the basic things we do to express love is giving. Naturally, we give of our time, talents and treasure to our family and friends.

In this time of Lent, we are called to expand our horizons of love to those in need through almsgiving. By giving alms, we not only help the less fortunate, we also grow in our own humanity.

Giving and receiving things is part of what it means to be a human being. None of us chose to exist. God’s creation is itself the primary gift.

From the very beginning, we are dependent on others for our basic needs. In God’s providence, the world is ordered so that other people, mostly people we will never meet, work to provide us with the goods and services we need to survive and thrive.

Although we usually compensate others for what they give us through the sweat of their brows, we must admit that everything we have can be traced back to the free gifts of God.

By giving of our material wealth, especially to those who are strangers, we are growing into our humanity as images of God. Almsgiving is a way of sharing in God’s work to sustain and support all his children.

This is especially true if, as the widow who gave her last two coins (Mk 12:41-44), we give out of our livelihood and not just our excess. Truly sacrificing for our neighbors, even those we have never met, is an imitation of Christ who gave his whole life for our sake.

Two temptations can inhibit our almsgiving: First, one might object that we ought to be teaching people to fish rather than giving them fish, that handouts only encourage people to beg and perpetuate a cycle of dependence.

There is truth in this sentiment. We have an obligation to advocate for social justice, defined as “the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is there due,” according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1928). But the obligation to address structural injustices is only the minimal

expression of the Christian vocation to love our neighbors.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the encyclical “*Caritas in Veritate*”: “Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other; but it never lacks justice” (#6). Indeed, we cannot separate justice and charity or think of them as substitutes.

In his message for Lent 2018, Pope Francis specifically called on Catholics to give to anyone who asks of us: “Even in our daily encounters with those who beg for our assistance, we [should] see such requests as coming from God himself.”

The second temptation is to make excuses like “the money I give might be wasted,” or “I only want to give to those with whom I am in relationship so that I don’t undermine the humanity of those to whom I give.”

These temptations are especially real in a time when opportunities for almsgiving might be mostly online. There is a lack of connection with the recipient or human recognition for generosity.

Jesus reminds us that this is how God the Father gives to us: with no regard for how much we waste that we recognize

him as giver. “He makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5:45).

This explanation comes only a few verses before Jesus’ teaching on almsgiving: “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mt 6:3-4).

The quote above from St. Ignatius about loving in deeds comes from the final exercise in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius instructs those making the exercise to recall all the gifts they have received: the natural gifts of creation, the supernatural gifts of redemption, and the particular gifts that make each of us special.

After considering how much God has

done for them, Ignatius anticipates that the prayer will move from gratitude to a desire to respond to God’s infinite generosity. What can we offer back to God? Simply put: ourselves.

Our material possessions are only a small part of who we are and what we have. But our money and time are essential parts of our existence that we can offer back to God by giving it away to our neighbors as alms. When we can let go of our own wants to fulfill the needs of others, we grow closer to God and grow in freedom.

Later on, in that same chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel, the Lord gives us a beautiful image of the freedom that comes from trust in God: “Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. ... If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown in the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?” (Mt 6:28-30).

(Jesuit Brother Brendan Gottschall is a Jesuit in formation currently teaching at Loyola Blakefield in Towson, Md. He also writes for The Jesuit Post, an online project of Jesuits in formation.) †



Migrants, requesting to have their status regularized by the Belgian government so they have access to health care, are pictured inside St. John the Baptist Church in Brussels on Feb. 23 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Helping those in need is ultimately rooted in God’s providential care for all humanity. (CNS photo/Yves Herman, Reuters)



A woman receives a bag of provisions from volunteer Claire Newman, left, of First Presbyterian Church in Northport, N.Y., at an ecumenical food pantry based at the church on Jan. 14. Looking on is Diane Ryan, director of parish social ministry at St. Philip Neri Parish in Northport. Giving alms to those in need is a way for people to show forth how they are created in the image of God. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Joyful Witness/Kimberly Pohovey

Perspective helps us see ourselves, others in a new light

As the summer months transition to fall and the temperatures become chilly, 50 degrees suddenly feels rather cold to us. However, when winter subsides and transitions to spring, we welcome that same temperature of 50 degrees as a major warm-up. It's all about our perspective.



Perspective enables us to see situations, issues and even people in a different light based on our experiences and knowledge, or that of others. Seeing from another's perspective helps open us to greater understanding. There are more than 7.5 billion people in the world, and each person thinks and sees differently.

The ability to reframe a situation is an important skill that can transform our own life, or our world.

If you've been reading my column in recent months, you are aware of my cancer diagnosis. I shared that information not to draw attention to myself, but hopefully to resonate with readers who have faced a similar struggle—which is always my prayer prior to writing each column.

My prognosis remains quite positive, and my treatment plan is as good as I could hope for, given that I have cancer. Still, there have been days when the

physical and mental fatigue has gotten to me. I try to remain positive and trust in God's plan. However, being enormously tired makes it difficult to think outside of my situation. That's when God intervenes and provides a different perspective.

Many times, when I enter the Cancer Center at Franciscan Hospital for my radiation treatments, I find myself walking behind another cancer patient. One day, I followed behind a woman who limped and was obviously having a difficult time breathing as she huffed and puffed in the cold air. When we were both situated in the waiting area, I asked if she was OK.

We struck up a conversation, and she shared that her asthma is bad in the winter. Sadly, she also shared that her husband passed away the year prior, and because of the pandemic, she can't regularly see her children and grandchildren. Seemingly, she is facing cancer alone.

I have witnessed quite a few elderly patients in the Cancer Center. I have seen patients in wheelchairs or walking with canes. Many have bald heads as a result of the ravages of chemotherapy. Quite a few patients have difficulty walking down the hall to the treatment room, and staff members tell me it is hard for them to make it onto the treatment table, much less hold their breath for some treatments.

The one who got to me, though, was a nurse whom I met for my weekly check-

up. After taking my necessary vitals, she shared with me that she is battling lung cancer—for the second time—and it is stage four. She recently finished radiation and is currently undergoing immunotherapy to treat her cancer. And, she couldn't have been more jovial, caring and kind. She said she is at peace with her diagnosis. It was such a gift to speak to her. It offered me a new perspective on handling my own cancer with more grace.

I've prayed for all these cancer patients I have encountered. However, the gift of perspective has allowed me to see *their* suffering, while checking my own feelings of self-pity. I have been most blessed to have so many family, friends, co-workers and online acquaintances praying for and checking up on me. However, greater perspective had me pondering how many people, cancer patients or otherwise, have no one to pray for them.

So this Lent, I decided to pray several times a day for all those in our world who have no one to pray for them. While I sincerely hope my prayers mean something to God, I also know that each prayer helps me better understand others' situations. It's all about my perspective.

(Kimberly Pohovey is a member of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis. She is the director of major and planned gifts for the archdiocese.) †

Twenty Something/

Christina Capecchi

Say what you mean, mean what you say

Dr. Seuss' fourth book was published in 1940 and met with critical acclaim. It features an elephant whose large ears and



long trunk provided the ideal infrastructure for the artist's distinct lumps and humps.

Today, the homely hero of *Horton Hatches The Egg* feels like a symbol of what we are sorely lacking in a culture that sets us up to be flighty

and fickle. He reminds me of a Gospel principle I have found more challenging now that I'm a parent.

The tale begins when a lazy bird, Mayzie, becomes bored sitting on her egg and recruits Horton to take over, vowing to return soon. He agrees and pledges loyalty.

His resolve is tested the first night with a wicked storm.

"This isn't much fun," remarks Horton, perched on the nest and soaking wet.

Once Mayzie lands in Palm Beach, she decides to stay. Winter arrives, and Horton is covered in icicles. "But Horton kept sitting and said with a sneeze, 'I'll stay on this egg, and I won't let it freeze. I meant what I said and I said what I meant ... an elephant's faithful 100 percent!'"

From his perch on the egg, Horton endures endless abuse, each time repeating his promise. His identity becomes his mantra.

Horton lands in a traveling circus, and—lo and behold, after 51 weeks of dutifully warming that egg—it begins to hatch just as Mayzie happens upon them. She claims ownership of the egg, which shatters and stuns, revealing a winged baby elephant.

Dr. Seuss asserts the rightness of the outcome: "And it should be, it should be, it should be like that! Because Horton was faithful! He sat and he sat! He meant what he said and he said what he meant ... and they sent him home happy, 100 percent!"

Horton's statement has since been borrowed by politicians selling straight talk, never bothering to credit Seuss. They could also cite the Bible, where the principle was first articulated. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are presented a teaching on oaths:

"Make good to the Lord all that you vow" (Mt 5:33). And then comes a memorable verse: "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more is from the evil one" (Mt 5:37).

I remember reading this as a girl and finding it simplistic. Yes means yes, no means no—yeah, yeah, yeah, got it.

I find it much harder as an adult, fielding invitations and opportunities that seem fine and lovely, but are actually demands on my time and threats to my priorities. Putting first things first, I've come to realize, is no small feat.

As a parent, it's even harder to say what I mean and mean what I say. My reflex is to respond as quickly as possible—not necessarily as thoughtfully. There have been times I've answered a young child without knowing what I have just agreed to.

I'm learning the value of taking a pause to give myself space for thinking—and to let my kids see that. I'm discovering the merit of a response like, "I don't know yet," and "Let me think about it." And I'm trying to halt my fast-talking, people-pleasing impulse long enough to size up a commitment before saying yes or no.

In the end, we are defined by the promises we keep. I want mine to honor the values and people I hold dear. When the going gets tough and I'm covered in ice like Horton, I want to "make good to the Lord," repeating my promises as a pep talk, embracing my vocation, turning my identity into a mantra—100 percent.

(Christina Capecchi is a freelance writer from Inver Grove Heights, Minn.) †

Our Works of Charity/David Bethuram

In Lent, minister on behalf of the most vulnerable with love

Jesus teaches that almsgiving means making the needs of others our own, especially the poor of our world. They are all around us: children and the old, the sick and the suffering, families and individuals, next-door neighbors and people in faraway lands.



Giving to the poor acknowledges and thanks God for his blessings. It also provides a tangible blessing to others. There's still time to give this Lent. As you remember the poor, one of the best things we can do is to not objectify them.

Consideration of poverty in Catholic social teaching begins with the foundation that each person is both sacred and social, created in God's image, and destined to share in the goods of the Earth as part of a community of justice and mercy.

From the time of the Deuteronomic laws, the covenant and the prophets, there was special mention of the poor and their privileged place in the community.

In the Old Testament, this group was primarily widows, orphans and strangers (refugees, migrants, immigrants). They were poor and powerless. Their poverty was often the result of unjust oppression. As such, they comprised "Yahweh's poor." The Lord frequently warned the Israelites about their duty to the poor: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan" (Ex 22:20-21).

Their special status reflected a combination of powerlessness, poverty, and systemic exclusion from the community. Care for the poor became the test of Israel's faithfulness.

The word used to reflect the community's duty to the poor is "justice." Instead of being recipients of optional charity or pious

generosity, the poor became the measure of Israel's fidelity to the Lord. Believers are charged to see to it that the poor are not without the means to meet their basic needs, nor are they to be excluded from the community or its decision-making by their lack of means.

If the poor around us now are uncared for, we too cannot know the one who says, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Jer 31:33).

In the midst of these challenging times, our ministries have been profoundly moved by the words of Pope Benedict XVI, who implores us to be organizers of love, and by Pope Francis, who challenges us to be salt, leaven and light providing a beacon of hope to those in need. We take to heart this mandate to love and serve as we commit ourselves to minister tirelessly on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Through our ministry of charity, we seek to motivate others to want to participate in this shared vision of mercy and justice to become manifest in the communities we serve and live today.

We aspire to model the way for others, by stepping off the path to compassionately encounter those who are poor and vulnerable. We challenge the process of existing systems by advocating for more just and compassionate policies and creative practices to address poverty and isolation.

With hearts filled with Christ's love and the power of the Spirit, we engage the hearts of our staff, volunteers, donors, policymakers, partners and especially the people we serve. And knowing that we cannot do this by ourselves, we invite you, especially during this time of Lent, to join us in care for and love for the poor.

(David Bethuram is executive director of the archdiocesan Secretariat for Catholic Charities. E-mail him at dbethuram@archindy.org.) †

The Human Side/Fr. Eugene Hemrick

Social media outbursts reflect need for reflection on our bubble

What is propelling outlandish public statements that are becoming increasingly common today?



Could it be they have become a new means for getting media attention and national recognition? Could ridiculous statements be a new avenue for shaking up people's usual way of thinking to create a revolution? Could it be caused by

exasperated people who use outlandishness as an outlet for their frustrations?

On the other hand, could the reason for the bizarreness emanating from so much media, especially online, be a lack of responsibility for not being in better contact with themselves and their

surroundings? Perhaps they are in need of making an in-depth examination of conscience to learn more about the factors governing their attitudes and actions.

In Ann Garrido's book, *#Rules of Engagement: 8 Christian Habits for Being Good and Doing Good Online*, we are encouraged to do some responsible soul searching on the environments governing our thinking, and convictions. She writes, "Open up the social media platform you visit most regularly and, to the degree that you are able, run some analytics."

She encourages us to ask the following questions: "How many friends do you have? How many are you following? What do you notice about your social media circle? What kind of diversity exists in your circle? Do you have friends/people you are following from different parts of the country? The world? Do you have friends of difference races,

religions, generations, political perspectives?"

She concludes this exercise by asking if anyone from our life, past or present, might help broaden the range of voices that we encounter in these online spaces on a regular basis, especially if that person might have valuable life perspectives to offer. And she adds this kicker: "Then check the organizations, causes and news sources that appear most regularly in your social media world or that you are following."

My guess is that most outlandishness comes from people who do little to learn what exactly is controlling their feelings and attitudes. They are living in a much more closed, provincial world than they imagined. Could it be they need to get a new, more self-aware, more informed, more responsible life?

(Father Eugene Hemrick writes for Catholic News Service.) †

Fourth Sunday of Lent/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings

Sunday, March 14, 2021

- 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23
- Ephesians 2:4-10
- John 3:14-21

This weekend, the Church celebrates *Laetare* Sunday. The name is drawn from what is the first word in Latin of the entrance antiphon for the Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, "Rejoice!" Lent is well under way. Easter is not that far in the future.

The reason for rejoicing is not so trivial as to say that the drabness of winter and penance of Lent soon will end. Rather, it is a lesson about life. Indeed, the drabness of earthly life someday will end. The glory of heaven awaits—just as Easter awaits us now.

Once the Church required, and still allows, celebrants at Mass to wear vestments of a rose color. It is not pink but rose. Pink results from an infusion of white, rose an infusion of gold. Rose, in today's vestments, is Lenten violet brightened by the sunbeams of the approaching dawn. That dawn, of course, will be the brilliant flash of the Resurrection.

The Second Book of Chronicles supplies this weekend with its first reading. Once Chronicles was a single volume. As time passed, and as editors and translators had their way, it was separated into two volumes. Thus, it has remained as two volumes, now appearing in all modern translations of the Bible.

It is part of the Bible's historical set of volumes. While these volumes tell of the history of God's people, their purpose is not to report history, but to reveal developments in the people's religious experience.

This reading recalls the bitter events that led to the chosen people's defeat by the Babylonians and the removal of many Hebrews, their numbers now unknown, to Babylon. They were not exactly enslaved or hostages in Babylon, in the sense that they were not held to prevent rebellion by their kin people back home. But they lived an unhappy life in a foreign and unwelcoming culture.

God freed his people by using the Persian king Cyrus, who overwhelmed Babylonia.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is the source of the second reading. It is an eloquent proclamation of God's mercy, declaring that, before Christ, humans were doomed to everlasting death. Then, by salvation in Christ, they are able to attain everlasting life.

St. John's Gospel furnishes the last reading, recalling a moment in the Exodus, that long march by the Hebrews from Egypt, where they had been slaves, to the promised land. Wandering across the stark and unforgiving Sinai Peninsula, trials were many—hunger and thirst among them. They lost their way. Another trial was the presence of venomous snakes.

Again, God supplied relief. He told Moses, the leader, to lift a bronze serpent on a staff and to hold this staff high. God promised that all who looked upon this staff would survive.

The implication of the Crucifixion is clear. The Gospel subtly reminds us that all who look with faith upon the cross of Jesus will live.

The Gospel continues. It is a moving description of God's mercy. Humans can find joy and eternal life only in and through Jesus.

Reflection

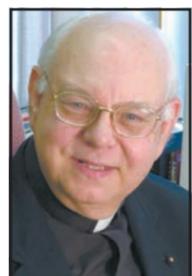
The Church leads us onward through Lent, reassuring us that Easter is not far away. In fact, it will come in only a few more weeks.

It is not about counting days. Lent is a symbol of life. If we have renounced our lives, perfecting our renunciation in the prayer and penance of Lent, we can expect to see the clarifying light and warmth of the sunburst of Easter.

Hopefully, at Easter, we too shall rise from the death and coldness of life without the Lord.

Lent's productivity and effectiveness, however, depends upon us, our sincerity and our cooperation with God's grace.

The Church today urges us to continue to make Lent effective. The daybreak is near! †



Daily Readings

Monday, March 15

Isaiah 65:17-21
Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-12a, 13b
John 4:43-54

Tuesday, March 16

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12
Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9
John 5:1-16

Wednesday, March 17

St. Patrick, bishop
Isaiah 49:8-15
Psalm 145:8-9, 13c-14, 17-18
John 5:17-30

Thursday, March 18

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop and doctor of the Church
Exodus 32:7-14
Psalm 106:19-23
John 5:31-47

Friday, March 19

St. Joseph, the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary
2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16
Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29
Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22
Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a
or Luke 2:41-51a

Saturday, March 20

Jeremiah 11:18-20
Psalm 7:2-3, 9b-12
John 7:40-53

Sunday, March 21

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51:3-4, 12-15
Hebrews 5:7-9
John 12:20-33

Question Corner/Fr. Kenneth Doyle

The Church allows members to be buried in non-Catholic cemeteries

Years ago, my parents purchased burial plots for my family in the local small-town cemetery where we lived. My



family is not Catholic, and I wasn't at that time either—so, the cemetery is Christian, but not Catholic.

I have since happily converted to Catholicism and am wondering if there is a way I can still use my plot. Can it be

blessed by a Catholic priest?

I would prefer to be buried with the rest of my family if at all possible and not have to purchase a plot in a Catholic cemetery. (Kansas)

Not to worry. You can be buried in your family plot, even though it is not in a Catholic cemetery. And you should be; I can imagine that your relatives might well be offended if you were to choose otherwise, and the Church has no interest in separating families at death.

The *Code of Canon Law*, in fact, speaks directly to your question. Canon 1180 says, "Everyone ... is permitted to choose the cemetery of burial."

As your question suggests, when a Catholic is interred in a non-Catholic plot,

the priest who officiates at the committal says a prayer, which blesses that gravesite and reads in part: "Lord Jesus Christ, by your own three days in the tomb, you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you and so made the grave a sign of hope that promises resurrection even as it claims our mortal bodies."

If given the choice, my own preference, of course, would be for a Catholic burial ground so that the deceased would have the benefit of the Masses and prayers offered regularly for those who are buried there—but there is no Church rule that requires this.

In your own case, I think that staying with your family's choice ensures that your loved ones will visit your grave regularly, take care of it and continue to remember you in prayer.

I was a fallen-away Catholic for 20 years, but I finally made it to confession. I had been unfaithful to my marriage, and my question is this: How can God forgive me for so much sin, and did I tell the priest everything that I should have told him when I went to confession? I am nearing death now, and I have a lot of concerns. (Kentucky)

I've found one of the hardest challenges in the priesthood is to convince people that God loves them. And yet the testimony to that is spread broadly across the pages of the Scriptures.

It happened that, on the day I opened your letter, the Gospel reading for that morning's Mass included the passage where Jesus invites us to "ask and it will be given to you." In those same verses, Matthew compares it to asking your father for some bread (Mt 7:7).

What father, says Matthew, would give his son a stone instead—and think how much more God loves you! St. Peter tells us in his first letter that we are "a chosen race ... a people of his own" (1 Pt 2:9), and John's Gospel says that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

So, there's no need to fear. God created us out of love. He wants us to succeed, wants us to be with him for eternity and promises to help us get there.

What you might want to do is to ask a priest to bring you the anointing of the sick and, if you feel the need to, go to confession once more. The priest will pray, asking the Lord to treat you gently and to ease your passage to meet him.

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12203.) †

My Journey to God

A Prayer and a Plea

By Bianca Vandenbos

Jesus my savior, my father, my king
Keep me loving, keep me humble
So pride won't make me stumble.
Your presence makes my heart sing.

You're always there
To listen and talk
To hear my plea and prayer.

This is my prayer my plea
Make me loving and more like you
Which is pleasing to thee.

(Bianca Vandenbos is a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in New Albany. Photo: A tear traces the cheek of Isabelle Hunzek of the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., during prayer time at the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16, 2017). (File photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in *The Criterion*. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; those are separate obituaries on this page.

BLOOM, Catherine A., 75, St. Malachy, Brownsburg, Feb. 3. Mother of Laura Burks and Robert Hoepner. Sister of Mary and William Bloom. Grandmother of two.

CANNON, Carl, 78, St. Mary, Lanesville, Feb. 2. Husband of Judy Cannon. Father of Lori Moberly, Nikki and John Cannon. Brother of Belle and Monia Brown, Rose Conrad, Sharon Loew, Linda Windell and Keith Cannon. Grandfather of seven. Great-grandfather of three.

COPELAND, Frank W., 94, Prince of Peace, Madison, Feb. 1. Father of Jane Blair, Carter, Mark and Robert Copeland. Brother of Wanda Caldwell and Kay Richmond. Grandfather of nine. Great-grandfather of seven.

DOLL, Rachel A., 37, Holy Family, Oldenburg, Feb. 3. Daughter of Terese Doll. Sister of Michelle Huber. Granddaughter of Rita Brockman. Aunt of several.

DUNCAN, Alva D., 89, Prince of Peace, Madison, Jan. 31. Father of Deborah Morris, Alva and Edward Duncan. Brother of Patricia Patrick, Margaret Smith and Willis Duncan. Grandfather of 14. Great-grandfather of 27. Great-great-grandfather of 10.

DURAN, Richard J., 72, Holy Family, New Albany, Feb. 3. Father of Bernadette Munoz, Susan and Joe Duran. Brother of Paul Duran. Grandfather of eight.

ENGELHARDT, Amy Jo, 64, St. Jude, Indianapolis, Feb. 4. Wife of Thomas Engelhardt. Mother of Danny, Matt and Mike Engelhardt. Sister of Janis Klos. Grandmother of three.

EVARD, Agnes L. (Minatel), 89, St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower), Indianapolis, Jan. 31. Aunt, great-aunt and great-great-aunt of several.

FASBINDER, Marcia A., 84, St. Louis, Batesville, Feb. 2. Mother of Patti Borgman, Sondra Prickel, Paula Volz, Suzanne Westerfield, Dan, Mark and Scott Fasbinder. Sister of Larry and Stephen Fehlinger. Grandmother of 21. Great-grandmother of 23.

GREEN, Tommy Lee, 76, St. Bartholomew, Columbus, Feb. 4. Husband of Betty Green. Father of Gina Orrison and Darren Green. Grandfather of five. Great-grandfather of five.

HECKMAN, Helen (Warner), 57, St. Bartholomew, Columbus, Feb. 4. Wife of Chuck Heckman. Mother of David, Patrick and Ryan Heckman. Daughter of Jack Warner, Sr. Sister of Marilyn Vining and Jack Warner, Jr.

KANE, Earl W., 87, SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood, Feb. 4. Husband of Susan Kane. Father of Cindy Miles and Gregory Kane. Grandfather of six. Great-grandfather of four.

KING, Joanne Q., 88, Holy Spirit, Indianapolis, Feb. 4. Mother of Sarah Conlisk, Denise Fuller, Julie Lower and Dottie Wyne. Grandmother of nine. Great-grandmother of 13.

MCCAULEY, Donald L., 87, Prince of Peace, Madison, Jan. 31. Father of Deborah Cross, Donna, Daniel and Darrin McCauley. Brother of Susan Barber, Lynn Lynch Hughes, Sarah West and Philip McCauley, II. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of eight.

MCKILLIP, Mary Ann, 91, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Richmond, Feb. 1. Mother of Jane Vogt, Jack, Jimi and Joe McKillip. Grandmother of eight. Great-grandmother of 10.

MCREYNOLDS, Jean C. (Raney), 78, St. Francis Xavier, Henryville, Feb. 3. Mother of Carla McReynolds. Grandmother of one.

MEEHAN, Therese, 84, St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford, Jan. 31. Mother of Beate Treske and Raymond Dougherty. Stepmother of Edward and Russel Meehan. Sister of Ida Firnschild. Grandmother of four. Step-grandmother of five. Great-grandmother of three.

MOHR, Henry, 88, St. Roch, Indianapolis, Feb. 2. Husband of Margie Mohr. Father of

Honoring St. Patrick



A statue of St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, is seen at the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, N.Y. The feast of St. Patrick is on March 17. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Dianna Volda, Brian, Robert and Scott Mohr. Grandfather of two.

O'CONNELL, Michael P., 63, Holy Spirit, Indianapolis, Jan. 31. Brother of Lisa Danhauser, Julie Davies, Eileen Whiting, Joseph and Paul O'Connell. Uncle and great-uncle of several.

ORR, Jr., Andrew, 83, St. Michael the Archangel, Indianapolis, Feb. 1. Husband of Elnora Orr. Father of Steve Loew, Andrew III and Antonio Orr. Brother of Janet Lindley, Mary Oliver, Henry, Mark and Ronald Orr. Grandfather of seven. Great-grandfather of 17.

PARAS, Kathleen M., 95, St. Luke the Evangelist, Indianapolis, Feb. 3. Mother of Carol Swihart, Kathy, Brian and Mark Paras. Grandmother of nine. Great-grandmother of eight.

PAULIN, Edward, 89, St. Paul, Tell City, Feb. 6. Husband of Jane Paulin. Father of Christine Beeler, Theresa Lipps, Beth Roberts and Kevin

Paulin. Grandfather and great-grandfather of several.

RENEE, Lisa, 74, St. Lawrence, Indianapolis, Jan. 11. Mother of Julie Bishop. Sister of Gary Cameron.

RICE, Jr., Edwin, 90, St. Lawrence, Indianapolis, Jan. 2. Husband of Margot Rice. Father of Barbara Louder, Diana Vogel, Ed, Michael and Roland Rice. Grandfather of 12. Great-grandfather of 10.

RIEDMAN, M. Annette, 83, St. Gabriel, Connersville, Jan. 28. Wife of James Riedman. Mother of Kathryn Richards and Jeffrey Riedman. Sister of Karen Frank and Bruce Fassold. Grandmother of three.

ROSAS, Theon M., infant, St. Mary, Greensburg, Feb. 2. Son of Mc and Sandi Rosas. Grandson of Meng and Rosita Teodoro, and Damasino and Anita Rosas. Great-grandson of Rizalina Liwanag.

RUBLE, Nina J., 88, Prince of Peace, Madison, Feb. 1. Mother of Joan Deal, Joyce Franklin, Janet Myers, Anita

Strack, Sheila, Raymond and Tony Ruble. Grandmother of 16. Great-grandmother of 28. Great-great-grandmother of six.

STIEL, Christa, 90, St. Lawrence, Indianapolis, Jan. 8. Wife of Adam Stiel. Mother of Sylvia Zinola.

THORPE-GOELBEL, Jerri M., 85, Prince of Peace, Madison, Feb. 1. Mother of Cyndie Andrew, Louann Merrell and Ralph Thorpe. Sister of Marge and Steve Harmon. Grandmother of eight. Great-grandmother of three.

TURRILL, Glenda, 79, Holy Family, New Albany, Feb. 1. Mother of Shannon Carter and Ed Skees. Grandmother of six.

VOLK, Paul J., 88, All Saints, Dearborn County, Feb. 6. Father of Lisa Allen, Marie Frey, Linda and David Volk. Brother of Mary Moster, Rosean Tumlin, Margaret Wuebolt and George Volk. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of 13.

WHITWORTH, Terry Lee, 59, St. John Paul II,

Sellersburg, Feb. 1. Husband of Marian Whitworth. Father of Mattie Whitworth. Son of Narvin and Laverne Whitworth. Brother of Mike Whitworth.

WILZBACHER, Dr. Gerald H., 84, St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower), Indianapolis, Feb. 3. Husband of Janet Wilzbacher. Father of Teri Lane, Susie Wuestesfeld and Debby Wilzbacher. Brother of Rita Morris, Irma Rexing, Arlene Steckler and Robert Wilzbacher. Grandfather of six.

WRIGHT, Rita A., 89, St. Joseph, Corydon, Feb. 1. Mother of Gwendolyn Albin, Pamela Sieg, Dennis and Jeffrey Wright. Grandmother of four. Great-grandmother of two.

YOCHUM, Barbara A., 86, St. Francis Xavier, Henryville, Feb. 6. Mother of Laura Couch, Julie Anne Gardiner, Sarah Sue Mayhall, Hugh and Lawrence Yochum, Jr. Sister of Hugh Houghton. Grandmother of 15. Great-grandmother of 23. †

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Cardinal's Lenten meditation: Jesus offers us his beatitudes as a model to follow in our lives

VATICAN CITY (CNS) —Jesus offers humanity a concrete model for holiness that can be lived each day, said Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, offering the second meditation of Lent for leaders of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees.

"The life Jesus proposes to others is his way of being. The beatitudes are the self-portrait of Jesus. He teaches by what he does," the cardinal said on March 5 in the Vatican's Paul VI audience hall.

The pope was not present as he was in Iraq, but the cardinal led the "Hail Mary" with those present "so that Our Lady may protect the pope during this trip."

In his meditation, Cardinal Cantalamessa talked about how the center and focus of the Church and of each Christian's life needs to be Jesus Christ. Jesus "is not a man like all others; he is the man

all others must be like," he said. The ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras declared, " 'man is the measure of all things,' " the cardinal said. "Now we know which man is the measure of all things. This man—Jesus."

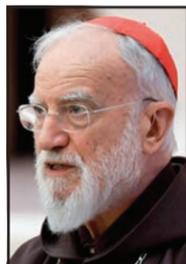
Jesus offers humanity a model of holiness that is not abstract or philosophical, rather "it is a real holiness, lived out moment by moment in the concrete situations of life," he said.

The beatitudes, in fact, reflect Jesus' life and what he proposes to everyone.

The great surprise and good news of Christ is that he actually offers and gives his holiness, the cardinal said.

"Christianity does not begin with telling people what they have to do to be saved, it begins by telling them what God did to save them with his grace" and the reasons for that grace, he said.

Now is the time for people of faith to really believe what Christ has done, that he is offering his kingdom for everyone, and to then "to appropriate" this grace by living the way God has shown. †



Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa

IRAQ

continued from page 1

Islamic State militants (IS), he did not name the group until he was on the plane returning to Rome.

Even then, his point was not to condemn IS, but to honor the Christians, Yazidis and Muslims who resisted their efforts to set up a twisted, narrow vision of an Islamic caliphate.

“The life of Christians in Iraq is a difficult life, but not just the life of Christians. I just talked about the Yazidis and other religions that did not submit to the power of Daesh,” he told reporters, using the militants’ Arabic-language acronym.

The resistance, he said, “gave them a very great strength.”

The strength to move forward, to rebuild and to restore relationships of kinship and respect across religious and ethnic boundaries was a constant refrain during Pope Francis’ trip.

The refrain was loudest amid ruins.

With representatives of Muslim, Christian, Yazidi, Mandaean and other religious communities, Pope Francis made a pilgrimage on March 6 to Ur, an archaeological dig on a dusty desert plain about 10 miles from modern-day Nasiriyah.

There, at the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham, whose faith in God serves as the foundation of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, the pope called all believers to demonstrate their faith by treating one another as the brothers and sisters they are.

“From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters,” the pope said.

“Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: They are betrayals of religion,” he insisted.

The journey of peace, he said, begins with “the decision not to have enemies.”

Standing in Mosul on March 7 amid the ruins of four churches that Islamic State fighters had turned to a massive pile of rubble, Pope Francis did not name an enemy but pointed to the “tragic consequences of war and hostility.”

With Islamic State gone and work underway to restore Mosul’s damaged churches and mosques, Pope Francis proclaimed that today “we reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war.

“This conviction speaks with greater eloquence than the passing voices of hatred and violence,” he said, “and it can never be silenced by the blood spilled by those who pervert the name of God to pursue paths of destruction.”

Returning to Rome, he told reporters he had seen photos of the site beforehand but was not prepared for the reality of being there.

“I stopped in front of the destroyed church, and I just didn’t have any words. It is something you cannot believe, you can’t believe it,” he said. “It is just unbelievable our human cruelty.”

The first evening of the trip, the pope had met the Iraqi bishops and representatives of the country’s priests and religious in the restored Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, sometimes referred to as Our Lady of Salvation.

It is a church, he said, “hallowed by the blood of our brothers and sisters” murdered in a terrorist attack that shook the world. Forty-eight members of the church, including two priests and a 3-year-old child, died on Oct. 31, 2010, when militants belonging to a group linked to al-Qaida interrupted a service, detonating explosives and shooting people.

The memory of Iraq’s Christian martyrs, he said, must “inspire us to renew our own trust in the power of the cross and its saving message of forgiveness, reconciliation and rebirth.

“Christians are called to bear witness to the love of Christ in every time and place.”



Pope Francis receives a gift during an interreligious meeting on the plain of Ur near Nasiriyah, Iraq, on March 6. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

the pope told the Catholic leaders. “This is the Gospel that must be proclaimed and embodied in this beloved country as well.”

Bells pealed in Qaraqosh on March 7 to welcome the pope to another Syriac Catholic parish, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, desecrated during its use as a base by Islamic State fighters, who turned the courtyard into a shooting range.

While much of the town still needs to be rebuilt, Pope Francis said the presence of the jubilant crowds inside and outside the church “shows that terrorism and death never have the last word.

“The last word belongs to God and to his Son, the conqueror of sin and death,” the pope said. “Even amid the ravages of terrorism and war, we can see, with the eyes of faith, the triumph of life over death.”

With Muslim and Yazidi guests joining Catholics in the church, Pope Francis told the people that “this is the time to restore not just buildings but also the bonds of community that unite communities and families, the young and the old together.” †



A nun waves an Iraqi flag as she waits for Pope Francis to celebrate Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Irbil, Iraq, on March 7. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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Cleanse your hearts of anger, live the Gospel, pope says at Mass in Irbil

IRBIL, Iraq (CNS)—Having witnessed or even experienced persecution for their faith, the Christians of Iraq must be careful not to harbor thoughts of revenge, Pope Francis told them.

After a full morning paying tribute to the victims of Islamic State violence, Pope Francis reached the last major event of his trip to Iraq: Mass on March 7 with some 10,000 people at Irbil's Franso Hariri Stadium. Many ignored the social distancing measures put in place, and few wore the masks they were required to have because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Irbil, capital of the Kurdistan autonomous region in northern Iraq, hosts Syrian refugees and hundreds of thousands of displaced people, particularly Christians, from Mosul, Qaraqosh and other towns that had been under the thumb of Islamic State militants in 2014-17.

After blessing the altar with incense, Pope Francis blessed a partially restored statue of Mary from a parish in Karmless. The Islamic State militants decapitated the statue and cut off its hands. The restoration re-attached the head, but left the hands dangling.

"Here in Iraq, how many of your brothers and sisters, friends and fellow citizens bear the wounds of war and violence, wounds both visible and invisible," the pope told the crowd. "The temptation is to react to these and other painful experiences with human power, human wisdom," but the path of Jesus was to serve, to heal, to love and to offer his life for others.

Referring to St. John's Gospel account of Jesus cleansing the temple, Pope Francis said Jesus did not want his

Father's house to be a marketplace, and "neither does he want our hearts to be places of turmoil, disorder and confusion.

"Our heart must be cleansed, put in order and purified," the pope said.

Anything that leads a person away from God or causes them to ignore the suffering of others must be cleansed, he said. "We need the baneful temptations of power and money to be swept from our hearts and from the Church."

But, the pope told them, "to cleanse our hearts, we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering."

Through his own suffering, death and resurrection Jesus "liberates us from the narrow and divisive notions of family, faith and community that divide, oppose and exclude, so that we can build a Church and a society open to everyone and concerned for our brothers and sisters in greatest need.

"At the same time," the pope said, "he strengthens us to resist the temptation to seek revenge, which only plunges us into a spiral of endless retaliation."

With faith in Jesus and the experiences of the past decade, Pope Francis told them, the Holy Spirit sends



Pope Francis greets the crowd before celebrating Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Irbil, Iraq, on March 7. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

them forth "as missionary disciples, men and women called to testify to the life-changing power of the Gospel."

At the end of Mass, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil thanked the pope for traveling to Iraq during the pandemic, telling the pontiff he made real the saying, "Do not be afraid." The archbishop said Iraqis must give life to the pope's message of peace, brotherhood and forgiveness.

Then Pope Francis addressed the crowd—and those watching on television: "Now the time I must leave for Rome draws near. But Iraq will always remain with me in my heart. I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters,

to work together in unity for a future of peace and prosperity that leaves no one behind and does not discriminate against anyone. I pray that members of the different religious communities, together with men and women of good will, cooperate to strengthen the bonds of fraternity and solidarity at the service of the good and for peace. *Salaam, salaam, salaam, shukran* and God bless everyone, God bless Iraq, *Allah ma'akum* [God be with you]."

The Mass was the last large public event of Pope Francis' March 5-8 visit. After the Mass, he returned to Baghdad. He left Iraq and returned to Rome the following morning. †

Hostility, violence are 'betrayals' of religion, pope says in Iraq

UR, Iraq (CNS)—Traveling to the birthplace of Abraham, Pope Francis urged believers to prove their faith in the one God and father of all by accepting one another as brothers and sisters.

From a stage set on a dusty hill overlooking the archaeological dig at Ur, Abraham's birthplace about 10 miles from modern-day Nasiriyah, the pope called on representatives of the country's religious communities to denounce all violence committed in God's name and to work together to rebuild their country.

"From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters," the pope told the representatives.

"Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: they are betrayals of religion," he insisted.

Pope Francis arrived in Ur after a 45-minute early morning meeting in Najaf with 90-year-old Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam's most authoritative figures.

The ayatollah, who turns down most meeting requests, issued a statement after the encounter, saying that world religious leaders should work to hold "great powers" to account, calling upon them "to give priority to reason and wisdom, to reject the language of war, and

not to expand concern for their self-interests over the rights of people to live in freedom and dignity."

Pope Francis "underlined the importance of collaboration and friendship among religious communities so that, cultivating mutual respect and dialogue, they can contribute to the good of Iraq, the region and all humanity," the Vatican said in a statement.

The meeting, the Vatican said, also gave the pope a chance to thank the ayatollah and the Iraqi Shiite community, which "raised their voices in defense of the weakest and the persecuted, affirming the sacredness of human life and the importance of the unity of the Iraqi people" when Islamic State militants were on a rampage from 2014 to 2017.

Observers saw the pope's meeting with the ayatollah as a major first step toward creating the kind of understanding Pope Francis has with Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, who is an authority recognized by many Sunni Muslims around the world. The pope held a major meeting with the sheikh in Egypt in 2017 and, in February 2019, signed with him a document on human fraternity and interreligious dialogue.

At the large interreligious meeting later, with the Ziggurat of Ur, a partially reconstructed Bronze-Age pagan temple, visible in the haze, Pope Francis insisted that when Jews, Christians and Muslims make a pilgrimage to Abraham's birthplace, they are going home, back to the place that reminds them they are brothers and sisters.

Representatives of Iraqi's Shiite Muslim majority, its Sunni Muslim community, Christians, Yazidis and Mandaeans, a group that claims to be older than Christianity and reveres St. John the Baptist, joined Pope Francis at Ur.

Farmon Kakay, a member of a delegation from Iraq's small Kaka'i community, a pre-Islamic religion and ethnic group related to the Yazidis, told Catholic News Service (CNS), "To see His Holiness is big news for me. We want the pope to take a message to the government to respect us."

Faiza Foad, a Zoroastrian from Kirkuk, had a similar hope that Pope Francis' visit would move the government and Iraqi society as a whole to a greater recognition of religious freedom for all.

Wearing a white dress trimmed in gold and decorated with sequins, Foad told CNS that even though her religion is not an "Abrahamic faith," participating in the

meeting was a sign that all people are members of the one human family.

In fact, Rafah Husein Baher, a Mandaean, told Pope Francis that "together we subsist through the war's ruins on the same soil. Our blood was mixed; together we tasted the bitterness of the embargo; we have the same identity."

From the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and through the reign of terror of the Islamic State group, "injustice afflicted all Iraqis," she told the pope. "Terrorism violated our dignity with impudence. Many countries, without conscience, classified our passports as valueless, watching our wounds with indifference."

Just as Abraham set out from Ur and became patriarch of a multitude of believers in the one God, Pope Francis said, those believers must return to Abraham, recognize themselves as brothers and sisters and set out to share the news that God loves every person he created.

"We believers cannot be silent when terrorism abuses religion," the pope said. "Indeed, we are called unambiguously to dispel all misunderstandings. Let us not allow the light of heaven to be overshadowed by the clouds of hatred!"

Called like Abraham to trust in God and to set out on the paths he indicates, believers must "leave behind those ties and attachments that, by keeping us enclosed in our own groups, prevent us from welcoming God's boundless love and from seeing others as our brothers and sisters."

No individual or group can live in peace or achieve progress alone, he said. "Isolation will not save us."

The answer is not "an arms race or the erection of walls" either, the pope said. "Nor the idolatry of money, for it closes us in on ourselves and creates chasms of inequality."

The journey of peace, he said, begins with "the decision not to have enemies."

It means spending less money on weapons and more on food, education and health care, he said. It means affirming the value of every human life, including "the lives of the unborn, the elderly, migrants" and everyone else.

After both meetings, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi announced in a tweet: "In celebration of the historic meeting in Najaf between Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Pope Francis, and the historic interreligious meeting in the ancient city of Ur, we declare March 6 a National Day of Tolerance and Coexistence in Iraq." †



Pope Francis and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam's most authoritative figures, meet during a courtesy visit in Najaf, Iraq, on March 6. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)