Pope calls for end to senseless war in Ukraine

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis renewed his call for an end to the war in Ukraine and strongly denounced the conflict as a barbaric act used by those in power at the cost of innocent lives.

“We need to reject war, a place of death where fathers and mothers bury their children, where men kill their brothers and sisters without even having seen them, where the powerful decide and the poor die,” the pope told pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square on March 27 for his Sunday Angelus address.

The consequences of war, he added, especially the displacement of children, “not only devastate the present, but future of society as well.

“I read that from the beginning of the aggression in Ukraine, one of every two children has been displaced from their country. This means destroying the future, causing dramatic trauma in the smallest and most innocent among us. This is the bestiality of war—a barbarous and sacrilegious act,” the pope said.

According to UNICEF, Russia’s war against Ukraine—now entering its second month—has displaced an estimated 4.3 million children, which is more than half of Ukraine’s estimated 7.5 million children.

“The war has caused one of the fastest large-scale displacements of children since World War II,” said Catherine Russell, UNICEF executive director, in a statement on March 24. “This is a grim milestone that could have lasting consequences for generations to come.”

Warning of the “danger of self-destruction,” the pope said that war “should not be something that is inevitable” and that humanity “should not accustom ourselves to war.”

He also urged political leaders to dedicate their efforts to not only ending the war in Ukraine, but “to abolish war, to erase it from human history before it erases human history.

Pope Francis

Motherly embrace

Pope Francis consecrates Ukraine, Russia to Mary, page 16.

By Natalie Hoefer

Since Feb. 24, the world has turned its eyes to the war in Ukraine. The devastation and loss of life there are nothing short of tragic, and the number of refugees and displaced persons has soared.

But just 13 months prior, the world was focused on another country, Myanmar (formerly Burma), where a sudden military coup on Feb. 1, 2021, led to protests, bloodshed, loss of freedom and the fleeing of many citizens to the country’s jungles or beyond.

The ongoing crisis there remains an open wound for members of the archdiocese’s three Burmese Catholic refugee communities.

“Most of our family members from Kayan are displaced persons now,” said Rita Lwin, wiping a tear from her cheek. She, like many of her fellow Burmese parishioners at St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis, is from Myanmar’s Kayan State.

The same situation is true for Dominic Ahua, also of St. Pius X Parish. Shadows of concern cross his face as he mentions his parents, siblings and relatives still in Myanmar.

“They have run away from the war zone,” he said.

Archbishop Thompson shares his concern for refugees during Mass for peace in Myanmar

By Natalie Hoefer

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Pastor’s love of distance running draws him closer to God and his parishioners

(Editor’s note: This is the second in a series of stories about priests in the archdiocese who use their love of physical activity to connect with their community in the hope of drawing people closer to God.)

By John Shaughnessy

The unusual challenge involving Father Robert Sims would happen soon, but in this moment the pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis was leading a prayer for all the people lined up to run a race.

As he looked toward the runners and walkers who had gathered for the race—the kickoff event to the parish festival—Father Sims

See PRIEST, page 9

The smile of Father Robert Sims, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis, reflects the joy he has known through the years from running. (Submitted photo)
Confession is more about God’s forgiveness than our sins, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—The sacrament of reconciliation “is not so much about our sins” as it is about God’s forgiveness, Pope Francis said.

“Think about it: If our sins were at the heart of the sacrament, almost everything would depend on us, on our repentance, our efforts, our resolve,” but it is about God’s power, mercy and grace, the pope said on March 25 during a Lenten penance service in St. Peter’s Basilica.

The service, with individual confessions, preceded the pope’s formal act of consecrating the world, particularly Russia and Ukraine, to the Immaculate act of consecrating the world, particularly Russia and Ukraine, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Pope Francis went to one of the confessional rooms in the basilica and, remaining standing because of knee trouble, confessed his sins before joining more than 100 other priests in hearing confessions.

The Vatican penance service was canceled in 2020 and 2021 because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Pope Francis began the service praying that God would “open our eyes, that we may see the evil we have committed, and teach us our hearts, that we may be converted to you.”

The prayer booklet given to people participating in the service contained a 25-point “examination of conscience” designed to prepare them for confession and absolution by looking at their faith and prayer lives, the way they treat family members and others, whether they go to Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation, how they practice charity, follow the Church’s moral teachings and how they use the time and talents God has given them.

Holding the service on the feast of the Annunciation, the Gospel read at the service was the story of the angel appearing to Mary and telling her she would become the mother of Jesus.

Mary, he said, is told to rejoice, because God is with her. “Dear brother, dear sister, today you can hear those words addressed to you,” Pope Francis told people in the congregation. “You can make them your own each time you approach God’s forgiveness, for there the Lord tells you, ‘I am with you.’

“All too often,” he said, “we think that confession is about going to God with dejected looks. Yet it is not so much that we go to the Lord, but that he comes to us, to fill us with his grace, to fill us with his joy.”

Pope Francis also had a word for priests about how they should be ministers of God’s forgiveness. “Offer to those who approach you the joy of this proclamation: ‘Rejoice, the Lord is with you.’ Set aside rigidity, obstacles and harshness; may you be doors wide open to mercy!”

If a priest is not prepared “to act in the presence of his sheep in mercy and compassion,” the pope said, it is better that he not hear confessions.

And, to those who find it hard to accept the forgiveness of a sin in their past or are upset by their inability to mend their ways, Pope Francis said: “Do not be afraid. God knows your weaknesses and is greater than your mistakes.”

El Instituto Pastoral Intercultural de la Arquidiócesis organizará un evento para los graduados el 27 de abril

El Instituto Pastoral Intercultural de la Arquidiócesis celebrará su primer Encuentro de Liderazgo Pastoral para Graduados en la Casa de Retiros Nuestra Señora de Fátima, ubicada en 5353 E. 56th St., en Indianapolis, el 27 de abril, de 7 a 10 p.m.

El evento se llevará a cabo en español e incluirá charlas sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual y la función que desempeñan los líderes pastorales. Se incluirá la cena.

El costo es de $40, y el espacio para los asistentes está lleno.

Si tiene preguntas o desea inscribirse, envíe un correo electrónico a hernandez@archindy.org o a felix_javier2708@yahoo.com, o llame al 317-597-3751 o al 317-361-3381. ++

The Archdiocese’s Pastoral Leadership Institute will host event for grads on April 27

The Archdiocese’s Pastoral Leadership Institute will host its first Pastoral Leadership Encounter for Graduates at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., in Indianapolis, from 7 to 10 p.m. on April 27.

The event, which will be conducted in Spanish, will include talks on the Church in the world today and the role of the pastoral leader. Dinner is included. The cost is $40, and space is limited.

For questions or to register, send an e-mail to chernandez@archindy.org or felix_javier2708@yahoo.com, or call 317-597-3751 or 317-361-3381. ++

The archdiocese’s annual Chrism Mass will be celebrated at 2 p.m. on April 12, Tuesday of Holy Week, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis.

The Mass is open to the public, and all are welcome to attend. Doors open at 1 p.m.

Ordinarily celebrated yearly during Holy Week, the chrism Mass features priests renewing their ordination promises and the blessing of oils used for the celebration of several sacraments and the dedication of altars and churches. The oils are distributed to representatives from each parish taking part in the liturgy, who take them back to their faith communities across central and southern Indiana.

The liturgy will be livestreamed at www.archindy.org/streaming. ++
Father Francis Bryan served for more than 30 years at Marian University

By Sean Gallagher

Father Francis Bryan, a retired archdiocesan priest, died on March 23 at Franciscan St. Francis Hospital in Indianapolis. He was 85.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on March 31 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson was the principal celebrant. Father Robert Robson, pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Beech Grove and administrator of Good Shepherd Parish in Indianapolis, was the homilist.

Burial followed in the priests’ circle at Calvary Cemetery in Indianapolis.

Throughout much of his priestly life and ministry, Father Bryan was a valued member of the Greater Parish in Indianapolis. It is about 10 miles which was merged in 2014 with the former St. Joseph Parish in Sellersburg, the faith home of now-retired Father James Bonke, who was an archdiocesan seminarian at the time Father Bryan was assigned associate pastor.

Father Bonke described how Father Bryan’s example gave him a good model of priestly ministry.

“He taught me to learn as best I could, but also to be human and develop friendships and relationships with people in the parish,” Father Bonke said. “He respected everyone. He was quite intelligent, but he never made you feel less because of that.”

Andrew Hohman, an assistant professor of theology and philosophy at Marian, served alongside Father Bryan for two decades.

He saw the same quality in the priest that Father Bryan observed at St. Jane.

“He was a great priest and was always open to questions about the faith and his experiences. He was a great mentor for me and a person I could always count on.”

He always told me that he was going to die with his books on while serving God’s people,” Father John said.

He was a very popular teacher, very successful,” Andrew Hohman, an assistant professor of theology and philosophy at Marian, served alongside Father Bryan for two decades.

Father Wilfred “Sonny” Day, administrator of the Baptist Parish in Starlight, which neighbors St. Mary Parish in Navilleton, knew Father Bryan throughout his ministry in the Navilleton Deanery.

The personal connections he made with his parishioners extended to the other priests in the deanery, Father Day said.

“He always volunteered to help communal penance services in Advent and Lent,” Father Day said. “He wanted to be a part of that. He related to all the guys. … He fit right in and was one of us. He was always upbeat and always seemed happy. He didn’t spend a lot of time worrying about things. He just kept moving.”

Conventional Franciscan Father John Elmer, who preceded Father Pius as St. Mary’s pastor, spoke of his friend’s dedication to priestly ministry.

“He always told me that he was going to die with his books on while serving God’s people,” Father John said.

“He was very committed to serving the Lord and his children, whatever that was,” Father John said.

Father John also noted how helping the poor was a priority for Father Pius, who helped start the Franciscan Kitchen in Louisville, Ky., which now serves hundreds of meals daily to people in need.

“He had a passion to minister to those on the margins of society, those who were down and out,” Father John said.

Robert Joseph Poff was born in Julius and Catherine (Butliner) Poff on Nov. 6, 1934, in St. Joseph, Ind. After graduating from the eighth grade at the former St. Joseph School in Sellersburg, he enrolled at the minor seminary at Mount Saint Francis.

He became a novice in the Conventual Franciscans’ Province of Our Lady of Consolation in 1952, at which time he received the religious name Pius.

Father Pius professed simple vows on July 12, 1953, and solemn vows on and July 12, 1957. He received additional priestly formation at the former Assumption Seminary in Chaska, Minn., and was ordained a priest on Feb. 19, 1961, at St. Paul Cathedral in St. Paul, Minn. During the course of his more than 60 years of priestly life and ministry, Father Pius served in parishes in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin. This included time in the 1990s when he ministered as the rector of his province’s Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Carey, Ohio.

In the archdiocese, Father Pius served as pastor of St. Mary Parish in Navilleton from 2009 until his death.

He is survived by his sisters Barbara Poff of Sellersburg, Mary Reed of New Albany and Kathy Wesson of Charlestown, and brothers Dennis Poff of Sellersburg and James Poff of New Albany.

Memorial gifts may be sent to the Province of Our Lady of Consolation, Office of Mission Advancement, 103 St. Francis Blvd., Mount St. Francis, Indiana 47146.

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Reflection/John Shaughnessy

In search of wisdom: a touch of humor, an outpouring of love

Wisdom sometimes comes with a touch of humor, like this piece of advice about women and men:

“Women show that women who put on a few extra pounds live longer than the men who point it out to them.”

Wisdom can also come with an unexpected measure of common sense, such as when a college football player was once asked, “If you had to be stranded on an island with just one person, who would you choose?”

The young man thought about his different possibilities before sharing his surprising and insightful answer. “Someone who could build a boat.”

Wisdom can be shared with a succinct, straightforward message, such as the two-word piece of advice that doctors, fitness experts and other health proponents constantly give to all of us—love to binge-watch television shows or watch in each second of every game in the men’s and women’s college basketball tournaments or who just sit too much in our jobs and our lives.

Their advice? “Keep moving.”

As we head into the last part of Lent and toward Holy Week, there is also wisdom in adding another two words to the recommendation of “Keep moving.” “Keep moving toward Jesus.”

As I write stories for The Criterion, I’m especially drawn to sharing the ones that are about people from all walks of life who continue to keep moving toward Jesus, no matter the circumstance of their lives, no matter the pain and heartbreak they have faced in life.

Jesus came face to face with such people as he carried his cross to Calvary. Veronica came willingly out of the crowd to wipe his face with a cloth, giving him the same compassion that he shared with so many in his life.

So did the women of Jerusalem who wept for him when he crossed their path. Simon of Cyrene reluctantly helped carry his cross and then became transformed by the suffering Jesus endured and the courage Christ showed after each time he fell.

The good thief turned his head from his own cross—and turned away from the life he had led—to acknowledge the innocence of Jesus, the hope of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea stepped from the hidden shadows of his support for Christ to ask for permission from Pilate to bury Jesus.

They all kept moving toward Jesus. They all kept seeing him, looking past the scourged of his battered, bloodied body and his sweaty, dirty, spit-upon face to see the heart and the essence of Christ—just as he had always looked into the heart and the essence of everyone he met, no matter their circumstances.

And as they kept moving toward Jesus, he kept moving to Calvary, to his heartbreakingly death on the cross—fulfilling, through the sacrifice of his life, the two commandments that he said should always guide people’s lives: Love God, love your neighbor.

It’s the defining wisdom of Jesus, the life-giving example he set for us, and the surest path to keep moving toward him.

(John Shaughnessy is assistant editor of The Criterion.)

Parable reminds us to be people of mercy and forgiveness

Are you a forgiving person?

When it comes to family, friends, co-workers or others who have wronged you, are you able to get past the hurt and pain?

Do you seek forgiveness when you hurt others?

When you sin against the Father?

If we’re honest, most of the time it isn’t easy to work through any of these situations.

But the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:1-3, 11-32), which was the Gospel reading last weekend, reminds us that we are children of an all-forgiving God who welcomes us home when we return to him after going astray.

Father Francis said as much on March 27, sharing with us that God always forgives and joyously welcomes back everyone who returns to him, even after a life of mistakes and sin.

“God does not know how to forgive without celebrating! And the father celebrates because of the joy he has because his son has returned,” the pope said before reciting the Angelus prayer with visitors gathered at St. Peter’s Square.

Reflecting on the prodigal son, we read the younger son returns home after having squandered all his possessions.

His father speaks, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son” (Lk 15:21), demonstrating a humility that is a challenge for many in today’s me-first society.

But just as powerful is the compassion his father shows for a child who certainly disappointed him by his selfish actions, spending his inheritance on a life of sin. Yet, the father welcomes him home: “Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with him home: “Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with him home” (Lk 15:23-24).

The parable offers a beautiful example of mercy.

If we look back on our lives, the prodigal son could have been any of us at a time when sin entered our life. It may have been a time when we hurt our parents, spouse, children or other loved ones—even our Creator—by cruel words or hurtful actions.

Did we take the time to reflect on our actions and see they were wrong? Did we seek forgiveness?

When it comes to our Creator and our sinfulness, “We are that son, and it is moving to think about how much the Father always loves us and waits for us,” Father Francis said.

As Bishop Robert E. Barron shared in his Lenten reflection of this Gospel, “We are the children of God, we have been given life, being, everything by him, we exist through him at every moment. What is represented here so vividly is the meaning of sin, which means rupture or division.”

The parable can also serve as a reminder that the sacrament of reconciliation is always available to us, especially during the Lenten season, when the opportunities for confession abound. Look on page 15 of this week’s issue of The Criterion to see our full list.

We believe Lent is an opportune time to work on fraternized relationships. Our faith teaches us to “look for those who are far away,” have an open heart, truly listen and never make them feel uncomfortable, the pope added.

The father “celebrates because of the joy he has because his son has returned,” and, like the father, “we need to rejoice; too, when someone repents, no matter how serious their mistakes may have been,” the Holy Father noted.

We, too, have made mistakes. We have sinned against others. In turn, some have done wrong and sinned against us.

But with our faith, we can overcome the darkness or the separation or the distance from the one we love, just as we do with our relationship with Jesus.

“Let our love and faithfulness comfort and sustain each other, even when we are far apart,” the pope said.

Many mission dioceses serve a territory the size of Illinois, much of it uninhabitable desert or mountainous. Few young people are coming to Church, often hours away from stores, doctors— and church. Consequently, in one remote parish, a few people were coming to religious education.

With help from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, that parish’s pastor recruited a team of loving and energetic sisters to run a three-week faith formation camp for the youths. Those young people experienced such joy in their faith that many of them brought their parents back to church.

Gallup is just one of more than 75 dioceses, eparchies and mission prelatures in the United States and its territories that regularly experience such miracles through the assistance offered by the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. The parishioners are often people of great faith who just need resources to share that faith with their neighbors.

My brother in Christ, Bishop Nicholas Samra of the Melkite Eparchy of Newton in Massachusetts, travels constantly among his 54 parishes and missions, which are spread across New England, the Midwest and Canada.

Many have experienced dramatic growth from refugees fleeing civil war in Syria. Through gift of Catholic Home Missions Appeal, Bishop Nicholas is able to provide much-needed pastoral and social support to the Catholics who arrived with little but the clothes on their backs.

Many mission dioceses serve populations that are unknown to most people, but are close to the heart of God.
Sigamos el ejemplo de misericordia y justicia de Jesús

A muchos nos enseñaron de pequeñas la frase “el que tiene techo de vidrio no le tira piedras al vecino.” Eso es, esencialmente, lo que Jesús nos dijo en respuesta a su pregunta a algunos sacerdotes en el Señor: “El que tiene techo de vidrio, no le tira piedras al vecino.” (Is 4:18-19).

Lo nuevo, por supuesto, es que Jesús ve más allá de esta hipocresía; Jesús ve más allá del sentido de superioridad moral. En la segunda lectura del domingo, extraída de la Carta de San Pablo a los Filipenses (Fil 3:1-8), se afirma esta nueva forma de pensar: Como dice Pablo: “Una cosa hago; olvidar lo que está detrás y esforzarme a avanzar hacia la meta para ganar el premio que Dios ofrece mediante su llamamiento celestial en Cristo Jesús” (Fil 3:13-14).

¿Qué ganan los escribas y los fariseos al perseguir a una mujer en cumplimiento de la ley de Moisés? ¿Satisfacción? ¿Justicia? ¿Una forma de pensar que nos instruye a amar a nuestros enemigos y a rezar por los que nos persiguen.

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Sigamos el ejemplo de misericordia y justicia de Jesús
April 6
MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. Solo Seniors, 5:30 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.

April 8

April 9
St. Rita Parish, 1733 S. Heisler Road, Indianapolis. Lenten Fish Fry, 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m., dinners include choice from eight entrées, two sides, soda, white or wheat bread and dessert, $11.50-$14.75, entrée only $10.25-$13, side orders à la carte $7-84, required, walk-in or order in advance, to-your-car delivery available. Advance orders must be received by 9 a.m. Friday. Call 317-536-1047 or 317-632-9349, ext. 111; fax 317-426-5000 or e-mail srinecretnety71@yahoo.com. St. Joan of Arc Church, 4217 Central Ave., Indianapolis. Lenten Friday Devotions, advanced reservations required, 6 p.m. to 6:15 p.m., Mass 6:30 p.m., Stations of the Cross 7 p.m. Information: 317-283-5508 or mrcvb@sijaf.org. Elizabeth Ann Seton High School, 233 S. 5th St., Richmond. Spring Pops Concert. 6:30-7:15 p.m., featuring student musicians grades 7-12, doors open 6 p.m., bake sale, free will donation. Information: 765-965-6956 or sethanahan.org. April 13

April 15
Benedictin Hilton Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Avenue, Beech Grove. Called to Love: Lenten Morning of Reflection for Women, 9 a.m.-noon. sponsored by archdiocesan Catholic Charities-Social Concerns ministry, free, register by April 8. Information and registration: 317-216-1401, tchambles@archindy.org or curt@CCH2022.

April 17
Church of the Immaculate Conception, 1 Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Taize Prayer at the Woods, 7-8 p.m., silent and spoken prayers, simple music, candlelight, optional offline available at curt@CCH2022. Information: 812-535-2925, provcr@sp.org.

April 18
St. Thaddeus Bowman Catholic Women Monthly Prayer Gathering, via Zoom, third Monday of each month, sponsored by archdiocesan Black Catholic Ministry. 7 p.m. Join meeting: cutt.ly/Taize. Information: taizee@archindy.org or 317-236-1474.

April 21
Saint John Paul II Church, 1401 W. 30th St., Indianapolis. Monthly Mass, 2 p.m. Information: 317-784-4439 or www.catholiccathedral.org.

April 22-23
Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church, 520 Stevens St., Indianapolis. Pro-Life Series “Ballon Day Massacre: Childlessness on Purpose,” doors open 6 p.m., 6:30-9:30 p.m. Lecturer by Tim O’Donnell followed by panel discussion, free will offering. Information: 317-408-6811 or underly@gmail.com.

April 25-29

April 30
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22145 Main St., Oldenburg. Creativity is a Form of Prayer: Card Making, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., $45 includes lunch and materials. Information and registration: 812-934-6417, sisteranne@oldenburgfranciscan.org.

May 4
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. Contemplative Prayer—which way to go? via Zoom, sponsored by Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 2-3:30 p.m., Franciscan Sister Olga Wittkind presenting, free will donation. Information and registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgfranciscan.org, www.oldenburgfranciscan.org.

May 6-8

May 7
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. A Day with Mary, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $50 includes lunch. Information and registration: mountsf Franciscan.org/retreats-mary with mary-812-923-8817.

May 12
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May 12-13
Mount Saint Francis Benedictine Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, Oldenburg, Indiana. Third Thursday Adoration, interesting for women experiencing crisis pregnancy, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass 11 a.m. Information: 317-244-9902.

Our Lady of the Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haskerd Road, Indianapolis. Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m.-noon, arrive by 9 a.m. Rain or shine, three age groups, 0.3 years, 4-6 years, 7-10 years, bring basket, park at Felthaus, meet at Academic Building, free. Information: 812-517-8737 or glimmer@ oubdenbargadcom.


April 12
Planned Parenthood, 8590 Georgetown Rd., Indianapolis. Stations of the Cross, Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet for Victims of Abortion. noon-1 p.m. Information: info@divinemercycirclelife.org or 317-372-4000.

April 15-24
Prince of Peace Parish, Divine Mercy Grotto, 305 W. State St., Madison. Divine Mercy Novena, 3 p.m. each day except 5 p.m. on Good Friday. In case of inclement weather novenas will be in St. Patrick Chapel. Information: 812-265-4616 or unchililled@ mastore.com.

April 16
Pilgrimage Spirituality and Conference Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Teen Volunteering Opportunity. 9 a.m.-2 p.m., ages 12-18, assist with retired Providence Sisters. Information and registration: curtlf@theoldf.org.

April 17

April 19
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April 22-23
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April 25-29

April 30
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22145 Main St., Oldenburg. Creativity is a Form of Prayer: Card Making, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., $45 includes lunch and materials. Information and registration: 812-934-6417, sisteranne@oldenburgfranciscan.org.
Catholic in Recovery comes to St. Simon as way to help 12-step healing

By Natalie Hoefer

By the grace of God—and an abundance of humility, honesty and prayer—Mark was in recovery from the disease of addiction.

He was in a 12-step program, and it was helping, no doubt. In the created steps, Mark had come to believe that a “Power greater than himself” could help him.

But something was missing.

“Being a practicing Catholic, I found the term of ‘higher power’ less than appropriate,” said Mark. While some members in the program struggled with the concept of God or with God himself, he knew God was the only “higher power.”

“I did my own research on faith-based 12-step programs,” said Mark, a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, who for anonymity will be referred to by his first name, Scott. “Catholic in Recovery was one of the first programs I gravitated toward.”

The program “blends Catholic spirituality and sacraments with the 12-step recovery process,” with the majority of meetings open to those dealing with any kind of addiction, said founder Scott Weeman in a talk he gave on March 13 at St. Simon the Apostle Parish.

He was there to launch the parish’s Catholic in Recovery (CIR) in-person general recovery group, the first in Indiana.

During his talk, Weeman shared why he created the organization, what sets it apart from secular 12-step groups, and his hope for CIR “to share the good news that God can bring about healing and recovery, even in the most hopeless of cases.”

‘Clear to me we could be doing more’

Weeman didn’t develop Catholic in Recovery on a whim. It was created out of his own need as he worked through the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

“I realized that as I was working through the 12 steps on moving toward recovery, I was going through the same kind of spiritual recovery, too, that in giving my life over to God I was really leaning into my baptism,” he said.

“When confessing to God, myself and others the nature of my wrongs, I realized that was a lot like the sacrament of reconciliation.”

Some of the 12 steps are done on a daily basis, he noted, “like taking a personal inventory and staying connected to God through prayer and meditation. That seemed a lot like the Eucharist, the daily bread that we’re receiving.”

In confirmation, we’re asked to make disciples of all nations. The 12th step of addiction recovery is that, having had a spiritual awakening, we share the good news with others, much like the Church does today.”

As Weeman continued in his recovery, he also noticed there were “a lot of people turning to the Church for help and healing. As in a lot of ways the Church was delegating people to other 12-step programs—which saved my life and continues to save my life and should be delegating people to other 12-step programs—which saved my life and continues to save my life and should be able to offer a program that helps folks find even more support in their Catholic faith.”

Weeman created that place with the founding of CIR in 2017 in the Diocese of San Diego as a tool to enhance recovery for Catholics in 12-step programs.

‘Sacraments as they apply to recovery’

The non-profit organization “seeks to serve those suffering from addictions and unhealthy attachments,” according to its website.

In CIR, “people show up about their addiction or their loved one’s addiction, but they do so through the lens of the faith, sharing about how the sacraments, or dedication to the rosary, or the wisdom from the saints, how these faith practices are very instrumental in their recovery,” Weeman explained. “Those are things that would be out of balance with a regular 12-step meeting.”

He noted that CIR has spread to 15 states, and that nearly 50 meetings are offered virtually and in person.

General meetings, like the one at St. Simon, welcome those with—or those affected by someone with—any form of addiction or attachment. Other meetings are addiction- and/or gender-specific, geared toward family and friends or focused on adult children of dysfunctional homes.

Catholic in Recovery meetings follow the same flow as normal 12-step programs, Mark explained. The difference is “in the sacraments as they apply to recovery, and at the beginning of every meeting we review the Scripture for the upcoming Sunday Mass and tie those to our 12-step journey.”

“And we don’t hide our reliance upon God and Christ as our higher power.”

‘Called by God to give it a try’

Mark sought to establish the meeting at St. Simon in part because, while he appreciated CIR’s virtual sessions, he was tired of driving to Ohio for the closest in-person one.

“I find personal engagement to be a lot more meaningful,” he said. “So I either had the choice of moving or starting a group.”

To establish the meeting, Mark approached Father Doug Marcotte, pastor of St. Simon Parish, and explained the nature of CIR.

“I decided to support having Catholic in Recovery at St. Simon because the folks interested in leading this new ministry seem to be called by God to give it a try,” said Father Marcotte.

“In looking into Catholic in Recovery, I discovered that they have a record of success and a willingness to help new chapters get themselves up and running.”

“Once I knew I had the support of the parish, I began coordinating start-up details with Scott,” he said.

There were considerations that had to be addressed, such as “how to maintain privacy and how to gently offer opportunities to parishioners who need it” Mark noted.

“But the hardest thing was just opening the door for the first time and hoping someone showed up, which wasn’t guaranteed they would.”

Mark credits Catholic in Recovery with helping him on his path to healing.

Bishop asks for intercessions of St. Romero in countries at war

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington asked students from The Catholic University of America at a bilingual Mass on March 23 for the feast of St. Oscar Romero to pray for the Salvadoran saint’s intercession in countries at war.

Romero was martyred on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass in a chapel at a hospital for cancer patients in San Salvador. The day before he was shot to death, he had pleaded with soldiers to stop the violence, particularly against civilians and poor Central American country.

“I want to make a special appeal to students here at CUA and all Catholics: Each of you is one of us. The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God’s words, ‘Thou shalt not kill’” (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17).

St. Romero said in his next to last homily.

“I'm going on close to a year of sobriety,” he said.

“I'm connected to the 12 steps through God. ‘Catholic in Recovery makes for a very tangible source of strength to deal with my addiction and my recovery.’”

(The Catholic in Recovery general recovery group at St. Simon the Apostle Parish, 8155 Oaklandon Road, in Indianapolis, meets on Mondays at 7 p.m. in the Youth Center on the southeast corner of the parish’s campus. For more information on that meeting or on Catholic in Recovery, including in-person and virtual meetings, literature and how to start a group, go to catholicinrecovery.com.)
MYANMAR

continued from page 1

“I work here [in Indianapolis] so I can support them. The situation is not good for them.” Lwin and Ahua were two of nearly 500 Catholic Burmese refugees and sympathetic members of the archdiocese who worshiped at a special Mass at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis on March 20. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson served as the principal celebrant.

As the Mass began, he declared its specific intention: “We gather here to pray for peace in Myanmar and for the consolation of the Burmese people.”

“The ultimate goal: our salvation” The sanctuary was filled with colors and patterns of the traditional dress of the various Burmese tribes present. Most belong to three tribes, each based at various Indianapolis parishes, primarily at the Hakha Chin of St. Barnabas, the Zomi Chin of St. Mark the Evangelist and the Kayen of St. Pius X. There’s much uncertainty in our lives, in our world, particularly in places like Myanmar these days,” Archishop Thompson said in his homily, which was delivered first by him in English, then in the national Burmese language by Father Eustace Thang, parochial vicar of St. Barnabas.

The liturgical season of Lent draws attention from the uncertainty back to the higher call of surrendering “our lives more fully to live the divine plan for our salvation,” the archbishop said.

“The spiritual practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving enable us to remain rooted in faith and hope, trusting in divine grace, divine providence, amid the uncertainties of life, both now and in the future.”

“Wherever we may be at any given moment—whether here in Indiana, Myanmar or some other place in the world—the Lord is ever present and ever faithful in leading us to the ultimate goal and destination: our salvation.”

Archbishop Thompson closed his homily with words of consolation: “Despite whatever uncertainties that might lie between this moment and Easter, as well as beyond, Jesus Christ’s victory is already assured.”

“For me, it’s tragedy” Uncertainties continue to unravel in Myanmar.

“Security is deteriorating rapidly across the country as fighting and armed conflict intensifies with no sign of abating,” said United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees Matthew Saltmarsh in a Feb. 11 article on news.un.org.

According to a January 17 report on reliefweb.net, roughly 19,000 refugees have fled Myanmar since February 2021. A March 19 report on the same site estimates 519,500 people have been displaced in Burma since the beginning of the coup—up 48,000 from the month prior—and that roughly 1,600 have been killed.

Those statistics are more than numbers for Lwin—they are known faces and beloved family members.

“For me, it’s tragedy,” she said, a single tear tracing her cheek. “Within six months, I lost four family members from war, bombing and COVID. I am so sad, but other families have the same situation, the same story.”

The situation in Myanmar “is really terrible,” said Lwin, who serves as a coordinator of Burmese ministry at St. Pius X Parish. “We don’t know how to describe the situation over there. That’s why we are here [at the Mass] because we can only pray.”

Monica Cing agreed.

“We came here to pray for our family left in Burma,” said the 13-year-old student at St. Mark School whose family is of the Zomi Chin tribe. “The country has been really had these days because of the government.”

Several non-refugees worshiped at the Mass, including St. Barnabas parishioner Laura Sheehan.

“A lot of my students were born in Myanmar or have parents that were born in Myanmar,” said the teacher of St. Barnabas’ first-grade Sunday school class. “I came to show solidarity with them.”

So did the priests who serve in the three parishes with Burmese faith communities: Father Thang and Father Guy Roberts of St. Barnabas, Father Tim Wyciskalla of St. Mark and Father Francis Kalaparackal of St. Pius X.

Father Kalaparackal empathizes with the Burmese refugees. The priest, a refugee himself of an insurgency in Burma, said they have no freedom there. The people are suffering so much. They come here with nothing and no one to turn to.

But that does not deter their faith, he said.

“They’re a wonderful, faith-filled, God-loving, caring people.”

“We keep you in our prayers” That faith rang out in jubilant song and radiant smiles at the Mass.

The three Burmese communities each speak a different language. But many refugees also know the national language of Myanmar, making it possible for them to worship as a whole three times a year, said Lwin.

But having Mass with Archbishop Thompson—that was special.

“Especially I want to see [the archbishop],” said Kam Tung, smiling broadly. Tung is a Zomi Chin and member of St. Mark. “I wanted to see him and have Mass with all of our Burmese community.”

It was worshipping with that large community that filled the heart of Thomas Chan with joy.

“It’s amazing to be here,” said Chan, a member of the Karen tribe and of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. “I really miss my country. Even though the Mass is not all Burmese language, I feel like I’m in my old country. There is nothing like to have Mass in your own language.”

To honor the languages of the different tribes present at the Mass, six representatives read petitions, each in their tribe’s native tongue.

The celebration ended with an outpouring of gratitude for Archbishop Thompson. He received a standing ovation, as well as the gift of a framed, embroidered image of two angels brought from Myanmar.

The archbishop thanked the whole community.

“You have so much to give to the Church,” he said. “You are a blessing, you are a gift to the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.”

“We are grateful to you for your wonderful witness. And we are grateful for the two wonderful seminarians you have given us.”

“We keep you in our prayers, and the suffering of my home to Catholic Burmese refugees.”

Father Guy Roberts, pastor of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, distributes Communion during a Mass for peace in Myanmar at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis on May 20. St. Barnabas is one of three Indianapolis parishes that serve as a faith home to Catholic Burmese refugees.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson poses in St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis with a gift given to him on behalf of the city’s Burmese Catholic communities by Rose Awi, left, of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. (Photos by Natalie Hoefer)
many students experienced abuse. Cultural expressions were banned and where they lived and struggle today, and how the Church is willing to make the trip. The delegations’ trip to Rome, the Criterion  Friday, April 1, 2022 Page 9

Heads bowed in silence. The delegations trip to Rome, the Criterion  Friday, April 1, 2022 Page 9

The delegations trip to Rome, the Criterion  Friday, April 1, 2022 Page 9

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The delegations trip to Rome, the Criterion  Friday, April 1, 2022 Page 9

Before their meetings, leaders of all the groups said they want an apology from the pope for the Church’s role in running the schools. About 60% of the 139 schools across Canada were run by Catholic religious orders or dioceses. According to the government, which funded the schools, more than 150,000 First Nations, Metis and Inuit children were forced to attend the schools between the 1870s and 1997.

The groups want Pope Francis to go to Canada and publicly apologize for the Church’s treatment of Indigenous peoples and its collaboration with colonizers. The Vatican has said the pope is willing to make the trip.

The three groups were to meet again with the pope on April 1 to hear his response to what they had shared. First Nations, Inuit and Metis also want “unfettered access” to the records of the Church-run schools, said Caron, president of the Metis organization.

She said three of the delegates, survivors of residential schools, shared their stories with the pope. They “did an incredible job of standing up and telling their truth. They were so brave and so courageous.”

“We invited Pope Francis and Catholics all around the world to join us, the Métis nation, on our pathway of truth, justice and healing, and we hope that in committing to us, committing to real action, that the Church can finally begin its own pathway toward meaningful and lasting reconciliation,” Caron told reporters. “The only words he spoke back to us in English were ‘truth, justice and healing,’ and I take that as a personal commitment,” she said. “So, he has personally committed to those three actions.”

“We need to model being prayerful. We need to model working at learning. And we also need to model taking care of our bodies. I think we need to model that our bodies are temples of God and they’re something to be respected and valued.”

There are other defining reasons that Father Sims runs, including the benefits he gets from it. “They’ve done lots of studies that people who get exercise are less inclined toward depression, and they are healthier not just physically but mentally,” he says. “And I like the solitude of running.”

“I have a very nice life, but I don’t have a lot of solitude. I try to make time for it but once the days get going, I don’t have a lot of solitude. So that’s why I think I like running later in the afternoon after all the busyness of the day has accumulated. It’s the time to reflect on what’s going on and, in some ways, just release from the events of the day. It’s a great opportunity for that solitude.”

There’s also a spiritual impact for him, connecting running and his relationship with God. He refers to a thought associated with Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest, theologian and writer who viewed prayer as “wasting time” with and for God. I do think in some ways somebody could say that running is wasting time.”

Father Sims says. “And yet it’s not a waste of time. It’s ultimately quieting. It’s a time on your own.”

“One of the reasons I like running, I wouldn’t call it the monotony, but the constancy of it. Even when I was getting ready for marathons and I was running three hours, it was never monotonous. In some ways, it’s wasting time with God, but it’s really not wasting time. It’s spending time with God.”

Father Robert Sims leads a prayer before a race that kicks off the parish festival at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis where he is the pastor. (Submitted photo)
USCCB president, chairmen recommit Church to pro-life initiatives

WASHINGTON (CNS)—As the nation awaits the U.S. Supreme Court’s most significant abortion ruling in decades, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the chairmen of eight committees joined together “in prayer and expectant hope that states will again be able to protect women and children from the injustice of abortion.”

“As we affirm the value of every human life, we welcome the possibility of saving countless unborn children as well as sparing women and families the pain of abortion,” they said in a statement released late on March 21.

All eyes are on the high court for its decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which involves a Mississippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks.

If the court’s ruling overturns its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide, it will leave abortion laws to the states. Already, lawmakers in several states are working to codify Roe in their laws; other states have passed bills similar to the Mississippi law.

In their statement, Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez, USCCB president, and the chairmen of committees reviewed the years of outreach by the Church through various initiatives, parishes, agencies other entities to pregnant women in need and their families and children.

They recommitted the USCCB to these initiatives and urged Catholic dioceses, parishes, agencies and institutions to do the same.

“We proclaim a vision for our society which upholds that the every human life is sacred and inviolable—a society in which the legal protection of human life is accompanied by profound care for mothers and their children,” the bishops said.

Besides Archbishop Gomez, the bishops who signed the statement and their committees are: Bishop Thomas A. Daly of Spokane, Wash., Catholic education; Auxiliary Bishop Robert P. Reed of Boston, communications; Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., evangelization and catechesis; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City; domestic justice and human development; Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Ill., international justice and peace; Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco, laity, marriage, family life and youth; Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, migration; and Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, pro-life activities.

The prelates said the Church will recommit itself to its many pro-life efforts, including:

• Accompanying women and couples facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies and during their early years of parenthood, “offering them loving and compassionate care through initiatives such as Walking with Moms in Need and countless others.”

• “Walking with Moms in Need” is a nationwide initiative launched by the U.S. bishops “to engage every Catholic parish in providing a safety net to ensure that pregnant and parenting moms have the resources, love and support they need to nurture the lives of their children.”

• Ensuring “our parishes are places of welcome for women facing challenging pregnancies or who find it difficult to care for their children after birth, so that any mother needing assistance will receive life-affirming support and be connected to appropriate programs and resources where she can get help.”

• Helping Catholics “recognize the needs of pregnant and parenting moms in their communities, enabling parishioners to know these mothers, to listen to them, and to help them obtain the necessities of life for themselves and their children.”

• Being witnesses “of love and life by expanding and improving the extensive network of comprehensive care, including pregnancy help centers, maternity homes, and Catholic health care and social service agencies.”

• Proclaiming “with a clear and united voice that our society can and must protect and care for both women and their children.”

• Redoubling “our advocacy for laws that ensure the right to life for unborn children and that no mother or family lacks the basic resources needed to care for their children, regardless of race, age, immigration status, or any other factor.”

• Continuing to support and advocate for public policies and programs directed toward “building up the common good and fostering integral human development, with a special concern for the needs of immigrants and low-income families.”

“We are deeply conscious that, after nearly half a century of legalized abortion, more than 65 million children have died from abortion and an untold number of women, men and families suffer in the aftermath,” the bishops said.

They also said the Church will expand diocesan “abortion healing ministries,” commonly known as Project Rachel Ministry, “so that women and men receive forgiveness, healing, and spiritual renewal through Christ’s infinite mercy.”

Among them are the people of the Marshall Islands, whose five islands and 29 atolls in the South Pacific are scattered across an area larger than California. A half-dozen priests serve 5,000 Catholics, who comprise about 10% of the population.

Despite their poverty, these Catholics offer joyous witness to the Christian faith. Seafarers, who often spend months or years away from their families under grueling conditions, are of special concern. Thanks to your donations, sailors and fishermen arriving in ports across these islands can turn to the Catholic Church for health care and counseling, as well as for the sacraments.

On the Blackfeet (Pikuni) Indian Reservation in the Diocese of Helena, Mont., children attending the De La Salle Blackfeet School receive a quality academic education that is integrated with both the Catholic faith and their Native culture. To keep the school affordable for impoverished families, most teachers are one- or two-year volunteers. Gifts to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal support the purchase of multimedia religious education materials for the De La Salle Blackfeet School in the Diocese of Helena to strengthen its evangelization activities.

Your generous donations to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal strengthen the Catholic faith among people in our country who have no means to support crucial ministries. On April 23-24, please give generously to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal through the offertory collection at Mass or your parish’s e-offertory platform.

(Bishop W. Shawn McKnight of Jefferson City, Mo., is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Subcommittee on the Catholic Home Missions.)

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Faith Alive!

Vietnamese cardinal sought spiritual renewal in daily life

By David Gibson

“Loving others is a spiritual force” that draws people closer to God, Pope Francis wrote in 2013, his papacy’s first year. In this way, he said, “we learn something new about God.”

The pope affirmed in his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” that “when we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s love.”

Faith renewal is no small matter, given faith’s interpersonal dimension, yet hold the promise of drawing people closer to God, Pope Francis said. Given faith’s interpersonal dimension, it makes sense in Lent to ask what it takes to renew and revitalize any defining commitment in life. I am thinking of commitments that tax our time and energies, yet hold the promise of drawing out the best in us.

Since faith renewal is no small matter, a little inspiration regarding ways to proceed couldn’t hurt. Many in our times have turned for such inspiration to Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, a Vietnamese Church leader whose faith commitment only deepened under the oppressions of a long imprisonment. Several days after St. Paul VI named him coadjutor archbishop of Saigon (today Ho Chi Minh City) the city fell to the communist north. He then was arrested and imprisoned. His transfer to Saigon, he indicated, was considered part of a conspiracy involving the Vatican. He told of being in prison 13 years, nine of them in solitary confinement.

It is what he decided to make of his time in prison that captures the attention of so many. His words quietly challenge others to consider ways of doing in their own lives what he strove to do during his long prison years.

Cardinal Van Thuan determined that his “captivity would not be merely a time of resignation, but a turning point.” He would “live the present moment and fill it with love.”

His intention was to speak “one language” and wear “one uniform,” the language and uniform of love. He famously befriended some prison guards. “After all, they were my brothers,” he said.


Pope Francis singled out Cardinal Van Thuan in “Christ Is Alive,” a 2019 apostolic exhortation. The pope noted how, despite the cardinal’s imprisonment, he was determined to “seize the occasions that present themselves every day” and to “accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way” (#148).

Those are the precise words that so many find inspiring. What ordinary actions in anyone’s life can be accomplished in extraordinary ways?

One notable Lenten reality is that the best-laid plans for faith renewal so easily disappear into the fog created by time rushes by. Other pressing duties re-emerge, and soon Lent ends.

Fortunately, renewal is not reserved to Lent’s 40 days. Any day is a time for faith renewal.

Does faith’s interpersonal dimension suggest that its growth might be jump-started by eyes wide open and ears perked up to see others clearly and hear better what they may have been trying to tell us for a long time?

Sometimes, the challenges that arise for us seem mind-boggling, other times not so much. Pope Francis talked about this in “Rejoice and Be Glad,” saying: “At times, life presents great challenges. Through them, the Lord calls us anew to a conversion” (#17). However, “other times we need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing” (#17).

His comment about “what we are already doing” resembles Cardinal Van Thuan’s comment about accomplishing “ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.” What ordinary actions, what things that we already do can be done more perfectly or more extraordinarily?

I recall St. Teresa of Calcutta saying that when she had nothing to give to someone, she gave her smile. Is a smile an ordinary action that can become extraordinary?

Other ordinary gifts that could become extraordinary might include our patience, precious time, kindness or our way of speaking, with its potential to convey respect.

There is also the possible gift of noticing the goodness in someone else that, for whatever reasons, was lost from sight and mind too many weeks or months or years ago.

(David Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years.)†
Let the Lord reform and transform your heart this Lent

During a recent Mass, the Holy Spirit led me to focus on a line from a reading in the book of Hebrews: “What great nation is there that has god so close to it, that when God calls to it?” (De 4:7).

My heart was moved with gratitude for the real presence of God who comes to us in the Eucharist, and through God reveals himself through Scripture and is so close to us that we can feel God's presence. The Holy Spirit led me deeper, and I was filled with joy at the even greater gift that was right before me in Church as I was participating in Mass.

Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, is before me, truly present in the Eucharist. Our living God fully alive in the Word was made flesh and is dwelling among us at every Mass and in every tabernacle throughout the world! What an honor and a privilege it is to be Catholic.

We truly appreciate the gift that has been given to us! Do we live as though we are this “great nation”? Do we live as God's beloved chosen people who can call upon him or even go visit him at any parish?

I know I forget this truth! I am a beloved daughter of God, but also know that I struggle with feelings of unworthiness of such a wonderful love due to my own failures, sins and experiences. But the good news is that Jesus Christ came into our suffering and sinfulness to heal us, restore us, and transform us. I want to be in full communion with God the Father.

I wanted to share a reflection I recently composed after my own prayerful reading of Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity's Lenten journal, “Restore.”

I hope that you can take it to adoration or a chapel. Ask the Lord what he wants to reveal to you in it and what he wants to heal you in this season of Lent. If we can remove the barriers in our heart that are blocking our view of Jesus, then maybe we can receive the truth that “we are a great nation, a nation of priests, in the presence of our God. The following is my reflection:

Quiet your heart. Place yourself in the presence of the Lord. The Lord wants to show you he sees you. He wants to be near to you, to love you and to heal you. Remember the Lord's preference: he does not force, manipulate or pry open. He is patient, and he sits with us. He is gentle. Listen to his voice. It is tender, strong and unswerving, yet gentle and kind.

Sitting in his presence, there is peace. There is no judgment or anger. He understands our hesitations and our fears. He knows our sins and our weaknesses. He also knows who we were to be and the abundant life he wants to give us. Jesus waits until we are ready. Jesus waits up to follow him into the hidden places of our heart. Jesus will always go before us; he only asks us to follow. Jesus wants to stay with us, but he will not go where he is not invited. He respects our “Yes” and our “No.”

He gives us free will to choose him and invite him in. God is respectful and patient. He will wait. Let us invite him into the relationships in our hearts. What does Jesus inviting you to surrender? Ask him in the quiet of your heart and listen.

When I was a boy, there was a revolution in Hungary against the communist government. The Union put it down brutally. Several hundred thousand Hungarians fled the country, and 800,000 for the United States.

My grandfather fled in one of the boats. They moved into the little white house where he had stayed for a year or two, until he was able to live on his own.

The children were a wonder to us. Their clothes were different. We had never heard their language before.

I’ve been thinking about this as I have watched the news about the invasion of Ukraine. The Russians have bombarded civilian areas, and nearly 4 million people have fled the country. Sixty percent of them have gone to Poland, their neighbor to the west. Most are women and children. The men have stayed behind to fight.

The Polish government has provided an easy off-ramp. It is accepting refugees with minimal vetting. It will allow Ukrainians social benefits available to permanent residents. Arrivals at the border are being directed to reception centers where they can get food and beds, medical care and legal services. The European Commission has approved a Temporary Protection Directive that will allow Ukrainians to stay in EU member states for up to three years. During that time, they can work and get access to housing, medical services and education.

These are generous policies, to be sure. But what I have marveled at are the night reports of ordinary people taking refugees into their homes. The New York Times reports that more than 500,000 Polish families joined a Facebook group that coordinates support.

These families don’t have a spare house like we do. They invited a stranger—perhaps with one couple who moved their 5-year-old daughter into their bedroom to make space for a mother and her 2-year-old son. Imagine living in that household. Overnight, your food bill doubles. Guests come with all their belongings. You are not even given an easy off-ramp. It is accepting refugees into your home. You are not like Danes and Swedes. There is a rough linguistic similarity, but they’re not like Danes and Swedes. Any complaints?

To most Americans, this prospect seems strange and off-putting. As Father Henri Nouwen once observed, here is “the assumption that strangers are a potential danger and that it is up to them to disprove it.” We protect our homes with dogs and double locks. We no longer pick up hitchhikers. We teach children to avoid the “strangers” who are the school security guards in subways and airports.

Something about our culture has bred in us an enmity against “the other.” I wonder whether our very prosperity is to blame. The rich can wall themselves off from the “other” and leave them to fend for themselves in our society. They choose their friends and connect at work, on social media and on a daily level.

And if you’re rich, you probably have never had to depend on the kindness of strangers.

Whatever the explanation, our fear of strangers may cause us to lose sight of an essential Christian virtue, says Father John Garvey. He says in Chapter 53 of his Rule, that “any guest who happens to arrive at the monastery, or any guest who happened to ring the doorbell, we would receive Christ himself, because he promised that on the last day he will say ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ ” (Mt 25:35).

John Garvey is president of The Catholic University of America in Washington. Follow him on Twitter @CatholicPres. Catholic University is on Facebook www.CatholicUniversity.edu

For the Journey/ Effie Caldarola

Listen to God, celebrate a Lord who brings life from darkness

The weather was nasty as I hunkered on a Saturday morning over my computer with my cat Lucy J on my lap, Rain, wind and icy scarts of snow blanketed the yard in my attic office as if to remind me that spring remained elusive.

In Ukraine, near to all our hearts right now, the Russians conspired to be an appropriate backdrop to Lent.

Our Ignatian Year continues. This means from May 2021 until July 2023, we celebrate St. Ignatius, whose Spiritual Exercises continue to inspire millions.

As I finished my reflection, I was filled with joy at the even greater gift that was right before me in Church as I was participating in Mass. I was filled with joy at the even greater gift that was right before me in Church as I was participating in Mass.
The Book of Isaiah supplies the first reading for Mass this weekend in Lent. The reading is from the second part of Isaiah, prefaced by God’s promise of his presence. God is present in a time that dearly was the best period in the history of God’s people. The people had survived being exiled after they, their parents or grandparents had experienced the conquest of the Hebrew kingdoms by the Babylonians. Exile was punishment, bitter and bad in every respect. By no means was all well when they returned to their homeland. It was not overflowing with milk and honey. To the contrary, it was lifeless and absent of yield. This condition easily prompted people to be cynical and to deny that God cared for them, even inviting doubts that God truly existed.

With great power and clarity, this section of Isaiah insisted that God will make all right. He is almighty. He will not forsake the people. He will cause rivers of life-giving water to flow into their hearts and minds.

For the second reading, the Church presents a passage from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians. Christians of Philippi had this in common with Christians living in every other major city of the Roman Empire: they were a minority and their devotion to Christ required of them a lifestyle and way of thinking utterly opposite the culture. Furthermore, political hostility surrounded them.

So, Paul in this epistle, as in his other epistles, both encouraged and challenged these Christians. This passage is eloquent in its message, using the imagery of racing. Paul says that he had not yet finished the race, but he had his eyes on one sight alone, namely the finish line. When he crossed this line, in other words when he died an earthly death, he would win the race because he would enter life everlasting.

For its third reading this weekend, the Church gives us a selection from St. John’s Gospel, which is a literary gem. It tells its version of the life and teaching of Jesus with remarkable brilliance and appeal. Important to this appeal is the Gospel’s clarity and pathos. Certainly, such is the case in this reading. The danger before the woman, and the mercy of God in Christ, are very evident. By way of explanation, the woman had been caught in the act of adultery. Jewish law and custom were very hard on adulterers, not to victimize women, but rather to secure the racial integrity of the people who were chosen to be God’s special people. If an adulterous woman gave birth to a child, conceived outside her marriage, then fraud well might taint the family’s line. Everyone knew that true fatherhood was unknown, and the genuine identity of the offspring might not be guaranteed. Finally, the Commandment would be broken.

Opponents hoped to discredit Jesus. By showing mercy to the woman, they would have said that Jesus disregarded or minimized the commandments revealed to Moses, belittling ancient Jewish custom that adhered to the commandments.

Bypassing the trap, Jesus boldly came to the woman’s rescue by forgiving her but upholding the sinfulness of adultery by admonishing her not to sin again.

Reflection

These readings appear as the cries of the Ukrainian people ring in our ears. Their suffering resulted from human decision-making, as does all rejection of God and of his law, with its inevitable product of death, guilt, grief and fear.

This story of the adulterous woman is a superb lesson for everyone. Jesus told the story to show mercy to the woman, but he seems to ignore the fact that people start coughing and sneezing—and some even walk out of church. Then he tells us that it is a sin to leave early.

The use of incense has long held a place of honor in the history of religious worship. Incense serves a two-fold purpose: The visual imagery of the rising smoke is symbolic of the prayers of the congregation being lifted toward the Lord; and the act of incensing pays honor to the object to which it is directed—to the just-consecrated bread and wine at their elevation, for example, or the remains of the deceased at a funeral Mass.

It also helps to create the ambiance of heaven, for as we are told in the Book of Revelation: “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer.” He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne” (Rev 8:3).

Wide discretion is granted to the priest as to how frequently to use incense. Theologically, it may be used at any Mass, although most parishes limit its use to Masses of particular solemnity, or the remains of the deceased at a funeral Mass.

A question corner

My question is whether we are still obligated to attend Mass on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason. I think that you will feel edified by the effort you are making to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation. (Editor’s note: This column by Father Kenneth Doyle was originally published in 2013. Publication of new columns by Father Doyle will resume in a few weeks.)

Q How often is a priest supposed to use incense at Mass—every Sunday or just at special times?

A A lot of people are allergic to the incense he uses. We have approached him about it, but he seems to ignore the fact that people start coughing and sneezing—and some even walk out of church. Then he tells us that it is a sin to leave early.

Q I live in a senior housing complex, and it is difficult for some of us to get to Mass every Sunday. No one drives anymore. The church is too far away to walk there. There is no city bus service, and taxis are very expensive. I am 85 years old, and my friend is 91. My question is whether we are still obligated to attend Mass.

A I do get to Mass on all the major feast days, and I watch the Mass on television at 6:30 on Saturday morning; a lay minister does a Communion service at our residence each Monday, with some prayers and the Sunday scriptural readings, and about 10 of us attend. We also had ash services substituted on Ash Wednesday. (Wisconsin)
Bella Nargis of Penascola, Fla., performs a twirl beneath cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin in Washington on March 21. (CNS photo/Karen L. Panter, Reuters)
Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Lent. The following is a list of services that have been reported to The Criterion.  

**Batesville Deanery**
- April 1, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at All Saints Parish, St. Martin Campus, Dearborn County  
- April 1, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2-6 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Morris  
- April 1, 7-9 a.m. at St. John the Baptist, Ogode  
- April 5, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Brookville  
- April 6, 6:30 p.m. at St. Peter, Franklin County  
- April 7, 7 p.m. at St. Louis, Batesville  
- April 8, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Aurora

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Batesville Deanery are as follows:  
- Wednesdays 5-6 p.m. at St. Charles Borromeo, Milan  
- Fridays 6-7 p.m. at St. Nicholas, Ripley County  
- Saturdays 4-5 p.m. at St. Charles Borromeo, Milan  
- Before and after weekend Masses at St. Maurice, Napoleon  
- Before weekend Masses at SS. Philomena and Cecelia, Oak Forest

**Bloomington Deanery**
- April 5, 7 p.m. for St. Mary, Mitchell, and St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford, at St. Vincent de Paul  
- April 7, 6 p.m. at St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville  
- April 13, 6-9 p.m. for St. Charles Borromeo, St. John the Apostle and St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington.  
- St. Agnes, Nashville; and St. Jude the Apostle, Spencer, at St. Paul Catholic Center

**Connersville Deanery**
- April 5, 6 p.m. at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Holy Family Campus, Richmond

**Indianapolis South Deanery**
- April 2, 8:30 a.m. at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood  
- April 5, 6:30 p.m. for St. Ann and St. Thomas More, Mooresville (Indianapolis West Deanery), at St. Ann  
- April 7, 6:30 p.m. for Holy Name of Jesus, Beech Grove, and Good Shepherd at Holy Name of Jesus

**Indianapolis West Deanery**
- April 5, 6:30 p.m. for St. Thomas More, Mooresville, and St. Ann (Indianapolis South Deanery) at St. Ann

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the West Deanery are as follows:  
- Tuesdays 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica  
- Wednesdays after 9 a.m. Mass at St. Anthony; 6-7 p.m. at Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville; and 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica  
- Thursdays after 9 a.m. Mass at St. Anthony, and 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica  
- Fridays after 9 a.m. Mass at St. Anthony; 3:30-4:30 p.m. at St. Christopher; and 5-7 p.m. at St. Monica  
- Saturdays 3:30-4 p.m. at St. Anthony; 3:45-4:30 p.m. at Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville; 4-4:45 p.m. at St. Monica, and 4:30-5 p.m. at St. Christopher  
- Sundays 8-8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony, and 1:45-2:45 p.m at St. Monica

**New Albany Deanery**
- April 5, 6:30 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville  
- April 6, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Laplace  
- April 7, 7 p.m. in English and Spanish at St. Mary, New Albany  
- April 10, 1 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Starlight

**Seymour Deanery**
- April 6, 4:30-6 p.m. at St. Patrick, Salem  
- April 6, 6-8 p.m. at St. Ambrose, Seymour  
- April 7, 7 p.m. at St. Rose of Lima, Franklin  
- April 7, 6-8 p.m. at American Martyrs, Scottsburg

Father Jha Lim listens to a penitent’s confession on March 7, 2021, at St. Aloysius Church in Great Neck, N.Y., during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the season of Lent, the sacrament of reconciliation receives special attention, as Catholics around the world seek the Lord’s forgiveness in the lead-up to Easter. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

**Terre Haute Deanery**
- April 8, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. for St. Patrick and St. Margaret Mary, Terre Haute, at St. Margaret Mary

Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Terre Haute Deanery are as follows:  
- Wednesdays 7-8 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute

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**Employment**
Pope Francis consecrates Ukraine, Russia to Mary

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—As Russia’s violent monthslong invasion continued to devastate Ukraine, Pope Francis laid the fate of both countries at the feet of Mary in the hopes that peace would finally reign.

“Mother of God and our mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine,” the pope said on March 25, pronouncing the Act of Consecration after leading a Lenten penance service in St. Peter’s Basilica.

Praying before a statue of Mary that was loaned by the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima at San Vittoriano on the outskirts of Rome, the pope pleaded with Mary to “accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end, and peace spread throughout the world.”

Sitting in front of the statue, which was placed before the steps of the main altar on a red platform and adorned with white roses, the pope proclaimed the act of consecration. During the prayer, the pope paused at several moments to gaze at the statue of Mary before continuing to recite the prayer.

“To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world,” he prayed.

After the consecration, the pope, accompanied by a young boy and girl, placed a bouquet of white roses at the feet of the statue. He then remained for a few moments, with eyes closed and head bowed in silent prayer, before stepping away.

According to the Vatican, an estimated 3,500 people filled St. Peter’s Basilica, while 2,000 people watched on video screens from St. Peter’s Square. Police asked pilgrims who entered St. Peter’s Basilica carrying or wearing Ukrainian flags to put them away, since the event was a prayer service.

Among those present at the liturgy were Andrii Yurasch, Ukraine’s ambassador to the Holy See. The consecration, he tweeted on March 25, is “another attempt [by the pope] to defend Ukraine from the devil’s war,” referring to Russia’s attacks on the country.

Joe Donnelly, a former senator from Indiana who soon will present his credentials to the pope as the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, also attended the service.

The Vatican announced on March 18 that Pope Francis also asked bishops around the world to “abandon themselves to her.

Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, led a similar act of consecration at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal.

Bishops from around the world had announced special services to coincide with the timing of the consecration in Rome, even in the early hours of the morning.

At the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica in Hagatña, Guam, Archbishop Michael Byrnes led the faithful in praying the rosary before reciting the Act of Consecration at 2 a.m. local time on March 26.

Archbishop Georg Gänswein, private secretary of retired Pope Benedict XVI, had told reporters that the former pope would join in the consecration from his residence.

In a video released before the liturgy, Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, major archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, said he would join in the consecration “because today we need very much the victory of good.”

The consecration, Archbishop Shevchuk said, “means that it is never possible to make a deal, to cooperate with this evil that emerges from Russia today.

“That and that is why we must pray for its conversion, for the eradication of that evil, ‘so that it’, as the Mother of God of Fatima said, ‘might not destroy other states, might not cause yet another world war.’ We, as Christians, have a duty to pray for our enemies,” he said.

In Rome, the bells of St. Peter’s Basilica rang out after Pope Francis concluded the Act of Consecration.

In his homily during the Lenten penance service, the pope acknowledged that the war in Ukraine, which “has overtaken so many people and caused suffering to all, has made each of us fearful and anxious.”

While calls to “not be afraid” may soothe one’s helplessness in the face of war, violence and uncertainty, the pope said that “human reassurance is not enough.”

“We need the closeness of God and the certainty of his forgiveness, and once renewed by it, Christians can also turn to Mary and present their needs and the needs of the world,” he said.

Pope Francis said the Act of Consecration was “no magic formula, but a spiritual act” of trust by “children who, amid the tribulation of this cruel and senseless war that threatens our world, turn to their mother, reposing all their fears and pain in her heart and abandoning themselves to her.

“It means placing in that pure and undefiled heart, where God is mirrored, the inestimable goods of fraternity and peace, all that we have and are, so that she, the mother whom the Lord has given us, may protect us and watch over us,” the pope said.

In his prayer, Pope Francis specifically asked Mary to be with those suffering directly because of the war.

“May your maternal touch soothe those who suffer and flee from the rain of bombs,” he prayed to Mary.

“May your sorrowful heart move us to compassion and inspire us to open our doors and to care for our brothers and sisters who are injured and cast aside.”