



1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2012

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RECALLING AND RELIVING THE PASSION A LOOK AT THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

By F. Jude Winkler, O.F.M., Conv.

At a conference several years ago, I was responsible for a display of children's books. All throughout the afternoon, parents approached and bought books for their children.

Occasionally a parent would tell a child to choose any book on the table -- but only one. The smallest children inevitably chose the same book: The Stations of the Cross. I had thought that the image of the crucified Jesus on the cover would frighten them, but in their innocent simplicity, they could see beyond the horror of the cross to the love it expresses.

It is that love we celebrate when we pray the stations of the cross. We are not just commemorating events that occurred two thousand years ago. We are entering into the passion of Christ to experience how he poured out his life and love for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Origins of the Stations.

The stations seem to have originated in the pious practice of pilgrims to the Holy Land who visited the sites of the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Among other sites, pilgrims would visit Golgotha and the tomb, both of which were soon enclosed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. These pilgrims found that there was something powerful in actually touching the place where Jesus died and rose.



We have an account, in fact, of a Spanish nun named Egeria who visited the Holy Land in the 4th Century, A.D. She describes the liturgy that was celebrated at the holy sites. On Sunday, for example, the celebrant would read the biblical story of the resurrection of the Lord. She wrote, "When the reading is begun, there is so great a moaning and groaning among all, with so many tears, that the hardest of heart might be moved to tears for that the Lord had borne such things for us." Likewise, she describes how on Good Friday, "the emotion shown and the mourning by all the people at every lesson and prayer are wonderful; for there is none, either great or small, who, on that day during those three hours, does not lament more than can be conceived, that the Lord had suffered those things for us."

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OVERVIEW FOR THE MONTH

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During the month of March, three prominent ideas are proposed for our contemplation by the liturgy of Lent: the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, baptism, and penance.

We will reflect on our mortality ("Remember man thou art dust") and the shortness of life ("and to dust thou shall return"). We will heed the call, "Now is the acceptable time, now is "the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2)." Just like Our Lord's earthly life every moment of our lives is leading up to the last moment -- when for eternity we will either go to God or suffer the fires of hell. The Solemnity of the Annunciation bravely appears in the second week of Lent; a pure white flower in the purple Lenten landscape. It seems to be, at first glance, a Christmas feast, but upon reflection we grasp that the feast is intimately linked to the Paschal mystery. For what Christ inaugurated at His incarnation in accepting to offer himself for the human race, he will complete in his sacrifice on the cross.

As the weeks of Lent progress let us not tire of doing our good works and penance, but continue with the enthusiasm of the catechumens on their way to Easter and Baptism. May our Lenten observance be a joyful journey — and not a forced march. □

FEASTS FOR MARCH

The feasts on the General Roman Calendar celebrated during the month of March are:

- 3 Katharine Drexel (USA), Opt. Mem.
- 7 Perpetua and Felicity, Memorial
- 8 John of God, Opt. Mem.
- 9 Frances of Rome; St. John Ogilvie (Scotland), Opt. Mem.
- 17 Patrick, Opt. Mem.
- 19 Joseph, husband of Mary, Solemnity
- 23 Turibio de Mogrovejo, Opt. Mem.
- 26 Annunciation of the Lord, Solemnity

The feasts of St. Casimir (March 4) and St. Cyril of Jerusalem (March 18) are superseded by the Sunday liturgy. The feast of the Annunciation is transferred from March 25 to March 26 because it falls on a Sunday. □

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

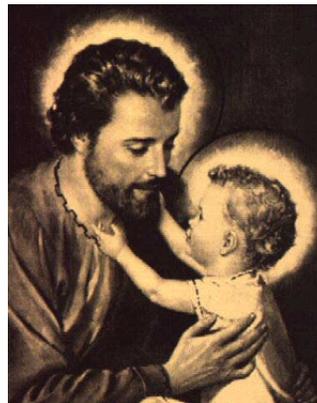
"ABBA, FATHER!"

ST. JOSEPH IS A GLIMPSE OF THE FATHER'S HEART.

By: Mark Hart

The first time Christ uttered the word "Abba" on this earth, he was likely looking into the eyes of St. Joseph. It's a point that is worthy of mention.

God the Father could have chosen to allow the Blessed Virgin to live and work as a single mother. He could have given her a couple of extra guardian angels or sent Elizabeth to care for her. He is the God who created the giraffe, the coffee bean, and cumulus clouds. He does not suffer from a lack of creativity or specificity in his providence, design, or problem solving.



Some suggest that God only had St. Joseph as part of the Holy Family because of cultural expectations, but that is dangerously presumptuous. This is a God who constantly laughs (Psalm 2:4) in the face of social norms.

St. Joseph is not window-dressing in the home of the Holy Family; he is nothing less than one of the greatest men to ever walk the planet. God the Father specifically called and designed Joseph to be the living embodiment of manhood and fatherhood to the second Person of the Holy Trinity during his most formative years. In St. Joseph, then, we're given a glimpse into the heart of God the Father. It would be completely illogical to think, after all the trouble of the Incarnation, that he would fail to choose a man who reflected his divine image of paternal love with the highest possible measure of human faithfulness.

Scripture reveals to us that St. Joseph's love for Mary was outdone only by his love for the Father (Matthew 1:19). Only his obedience and belief in the sanctity of the law could lead him to divorce Mary, but his love for her could not allow for harm to come to her, even if he was disgraced in the process. It sounds a lot like the love of God the Father, doesn't it?

How heroic the love of God the Father as embodied in Christ's earthly abba, St. Joseph! How many mornings did he rise with the Egyptian sun, an alien in a foreign land, armed only with a tool belt, venturing into a hostile culture seeking enough employment to keep food on the Holy Family's humble dinner table?

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KNOWING OUR SAINTS

FROM BRIGANDS TO SAINTS THE ADVENTURES OF GLADYS AND WOOLOS FEAST DAY – MARCH 29

By Woodeene Koenig-Bricker

A few individual saints, like Francis of Assisi and Ignatius of Loyola, led colorful and even sinful lives before turning their hearts to God. But only one married saint couple is as well known for their violent past as for their eventual sanctity.

They are the sixth-century Welsh saints Gwladys, or Gladys, and her husband, Gwynllyw Farfog (the Bearded), occasionally known as Woolos the Warrior. They started out living a life of plundering and pillaging, but ended up sharing a life of prayer and sacrifice. Along the way, their story wanders into the realm of romance novels and Arthurian legend before finally taking an unexpected turn to Christianity through the influence of one of the great saints of Wales—who just happens to be their son.

Not the Greatest Start. According to the Life of St. Cadoc (A.D. 1100), Gladys was the eldest daughter of King Brychan of Wales. A stunningly beautiful young lady, she caught the attention of one of her father's rivals, the robber chieftain Woolos. When her father refused to give his privileged daughter in marriage to a rough and uncouth warrior, Woolos did what any pagan brigand would do—he gathered up a force of three hundred men, headed to Brychan's fortress, and abducted Gladys.

After Woolos threw Gladys over his horse and rode off into the sunset, so to speak, her father set out to rescue his daughter. Legend has it that King Arthur spied the hapless maiden and was so smitten that he fancied her for himself. As the story goes, Arthur's foster brother, Sir Kay, then convinced Arthur to let Woolos marry Gladys; in turn, Arthur persuaded Brychan to bless the union.

Since King Arthur himself is an amalgam of legend and mangled truth, his involvement in St. Gladys's life is undoubtedly fanciful. In fact, another source, the Life of St. Gwynllyw, says that the marriage was conducted peacefully and, presumably, happily. Nevertheless, this addition to the tale is intriguing: It is the earliest reference to Arthur in any saint's life, and it indicates that the story of Gladys and Woolos had a place in the great Gaelic and British tradition of bards and ballads.

However their marriage came about, Gladys seems to have been quite content with her warrior husband and his rough ways. But their early life together wasn't exactly what you would expect of future saints. Biographers described it as "violent" and "on the run," even punctuated by occasional forays into piracy. The couple might have never become saints if it hadn't been for the birth of their first son, Cadoc.

Cadoc and the Cow. Cadoc was not a chip off the old block, perhaps because of his nature or perhaps because he was raised by the Irish monk, St. Tatheus. It's not because his parents had a soft spot for monastic life or even because they had a burning desire to give their son a Christian education that Cadoc ended up in the monk's care. The reason is that when Cadoc was born, Woolos went on a cattle-stealing raid to celebrate the event. One of the stolen cows belonged to Tatheus, and when the monk demanded his cow's return, Woolos gave him his son. (No one knows what happened to the cow.)

When Cadoc came of age, he turned down his father's offer to take over the family business and began evangelizing instead. Two of his first converts were apparently his mother and father. Gladys, who had probably been baptized as a child, seems to have returned to the faith first; she undoubtedly had a hand in convincing Woolos to adopt Christianity. But all the accounts say it was through Cadoc's prompting, prayers, and example that both his parents became good and just monarchs. Abandoning their raids on neighboring kingdoms, they devoted themselves to works of charity, church-building, and peacemaking.

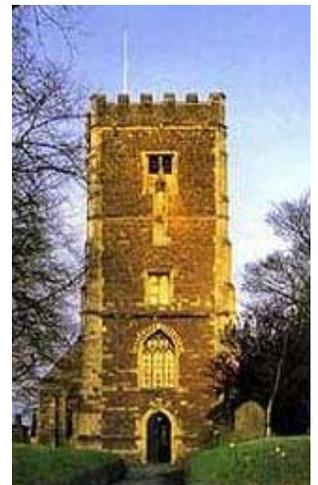
After several years of benevolent rule, Woolos had an epiphany, perhaps a vision. In response, he gave up the kingship and moved into a small wooden retreat house that he built at what is now Newport, South Wales (where St. Woolos Cathedral stands today).

Gladys went too—an unusual development, given that early medieval piety strongly suggested that married couples seeking holiness should separate to avoid "carnal sin." Woolos and Gladys bucked convention, moved to the hermitage together, and entered into a semi-hermitic life as a couple—a strong witness to the importance they placed on their marital vows. As part of their regime, they ate a vegetarian diet and performed severe penance, such as bathing in an icy river, for their past misdeeds.

And so they continued to the end—Woolos dying first, and then Gladys, at another hermitage (near Capel Wladus in Gelligaer), where she is buried. Both their names are recorded in the Welsh King lists, as well as in the Lives of the Saints.

A Couple for Christ. While the life of St. Gladys and St. Woolos makes for good storytelling, it contains some important lessons for us as well.

First, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the beatification of the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux as an example of a happily married couple who achieved



sanctity together. But a thousand years before Zélie and Louis Martin, British troubadours were celebrating the romantic love of Gladys and Woolos.

The couple never entered a monastery and convent, as was typical for people of their time who were seeking holiness. After their conversions, they continued to live together for virtually all of their lives, growing in their faith through mutual support. It was only late in life that the couple maintained separate residences. Since we know that St. Cadoc was with his father at his death, it may be that Woolos moved into his son's abbey shortly before a final illness, with Gladys established in her own hermitage close by.

All this makes Mr. and Mrs. Farfog stand out as one of our earliest examples of a husband-and-wife saint team. They even share the same feast day: March 29th.

Hope for Change. Second, we talk a great deal about the importance of educating children in the faith and setting a good example for them. But example can go the other way as well, from children to parents. It's doubtful that Gladys and Woolos would be saints today if it weren't for their son, Cadoc. (Incidentally, his four brothers and sisters are also saints because of his influence!)

Even though Cadoc grew up away from home, his parents obviously remained in contact with him—close enough so that when Cadoc was an adult, he was comfortable sharing his faith with them. Additionally, his example of giving up his father's title and lands for the sake of the gospel must have been a powerful witness to his entire family. His example— a saintly son influencing his parents, as well as his siblings—can give great hope to people who are the only practicing Catholics in their families. It shows that faith can bisect and even backtrack generations.

Toward a New Future. Third, the life of St. Gladys and her husband demonstrate that your past or even your present is not predictive of your future. Odds are that if you had told Brother Tatheus he was dealing with future saints when his cow was stolen, he would have been doubtful, to say the least. But Gladys and Woolos embraced the opportunity for change when it came to them. Their example tells us that we can too.

Time and again, God gives us opportunities to do something different, to make a new and better choice, even the choice to become a saint. We, too, can receive the courage to change old bad habits and behaviors and put on Christ in a new way of living, no matter what we might have done or been in our past.

The Power of Prayer. Finally, we can never underestimate the power of prayer. Although the chronicles don't say so specifically, it's safe to assume that St. Cadoc prayed long and hard for his parents. Gladys, whose conversion came first, undoubtedly prayed for her husband as he prepared for baptism. And he, in turn, became a prayerful man.

Because they changed their lives from rulers to ascetics as a couple, we can comfortably assume that Gladys and Woolos prayed together and discerned God's will for their lives as husband and wife. Although it's not likely that today's married couples would come to the same decision about how to live out their faith, Gladys and Woolos offer a powerful example of how two people, bound together in marriage, can seek and find God's will, both as individuals and as a couple, through prayer.

Millions of Saints. In the two thousand years of church history, millions of men and women have found their way to heaven. Looking at the lives of some of those whom history has virtually forgotten reminds us that holiness transcends time and culture. Every country and every generation has given rise to saintly men and women.

And that's the real lesson we can gain from this medieval family. Each of us has the opportunity to be a saint—not by becoming a world-famous missionary like Mother Teresa or an erudite theologian like Pope John Paul II or a martyr like Edith Stein, but by simply being the best version of ourselves that we can be. By living the calling God has given us; by loving our husbands and wives, our children and parents and friends; by doing our jobs to the best of our ability—which is exactly what made Gladys and Woolos into saints!

Woodeene Koenig-Bricker is the author of *Listening to God with Mother Teresa and 365 Saints*. In her "spare" time, she is working on a novel based in ancient Egypt.

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Abba Father

How disciplined a man to have undoubtedly taught the God of the universe to invoke Scripture each day by praying the sacred Shema (the Jewish daily prayers). Echoes of Joseph's and Mary's voices can be heard in Christ's responses to the devil in the wilderness, for his response to the first temptation is quoting the Shema he learned at the feet of his parents.

How focused and detail oriented Joseph must have been to make a living as a carpenter, in which the work of your hands points straight back to the craftsmanship of its creator. Could there have been a more perfect metaphor for the earthly father of God?

Consider the humility he demonstrated throughout the unique circumstances of Mary's pregnancy. Ponder his obedience in traveling almost one hundred miles with a wife in her third trimester. Contemplate the respect for others' dignity and heritage that Christ undoubtedly learned from his parents (Matthew 2:10-12; John 4:30-42; Matthew 15:24-28).

St. Joseph revealed the Father to Christ by who he was each day, not merely in what he provided for the family. He can teach us, too.

Adapted from Mark Hart's *The "R" Father*.

**SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD
MARCH 26**

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The feast of the Annunciation, now recognized as a solemnity, goes back to the fourth or fifth century. Its central focus is the Incarnation: God has become one of us. From all eternity God had decided that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity should become human. Now, as Luke 1:26-38 tells us, the decision is being realized. The God-Man embraces all humanity, indeed all creation, to bring it to God in one great act of love. Because human beings have rejected God, Jesus will accept a life of suffering and an agonizing death: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Mary has an important role to play in God's plan. From all eternity God destined her to be the mother of Jesus and closely related to him in the creation and redemption of the world. We could say that God's decrees of creation and redemption are joined in the decree of Incarnation. Because Mary is God's instrument in the Incarnation, she has a role to play with Jesus in creation and redemption. It is a God-given role. It is God's grace from beginning to end. Mary becomes the eminent figure she is only by God's grace. She is the empty space where God could act. Everything she is she owes to the Trinity.

She is the virgin-mother who fulfills Isaiah 7:14 in a way that Isaiah could not have imagined. She is united with her son in carrying out the will of God (Psalm 40:8-9; Hebrews 10:7-9; Luke 1:38).

Together with Jesus, the privileged and graced Mary is the link between heaven and earth. She is the human being who best, after Jesus, exemplifies the possibilities of human existence. She received into her lowliness the infinite love of God. She shows how an ordinary human being can reflect God in the ordinary circumstances of life. She exemplifies what the Church and every member of the Church is meant to become. She is the ultimate product of the creative and redemptive power of God. She manifests what the Incarnation is meant to accomplish for all of us. □

Sometimes spiritual writers are accused of putting Mary on a pedestal and thereby discouraging ordinary humans from imitating her. Perhaps such an observation is misguided. God did put Mary on a pedestal and has put all human beings on a pedestal. We have scarcely begun to realize the magnificence of divine grace, the wonder of God's freely given love. The marvel of Mary -- even in the midst of her very ordinary life -- is God's shout to us to wake up to the marvelous creatures that we all are by divine design.

"... I am your Mother Mary.

*On this day,
when you burn the candle of
offering, present your petition
not only for yourself
but for others, especially
those individuals whose
unbelief is their strength of
character and their faith in
Divine Providence is nil.
My children let the light of
love and strong rejection of
the culture of death continue
to burn in your hearts
especially for the unborn.
Pray before the Eucharist.
Thank you for listening to my
plea. I love you my
children."*

*Mary,
Your Lady of the Rosary*

GOD TOUCHED ME

MY PERSONAL CONVERSION STORY

By: Anonymous

I was born into the Catholic faith. During my teen years, I was "born again" and found Jesus personally but lost His Church. After thirty years as an evangelical protestant, I have come full circle to find that He has been there all the time, in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

It was easy for me to accept a view that Catholicism was not the "True faith" but "a form of godliness that denied the power thereof." That is what us re-born Christians would tell each other to explain away 2000 years of Catholicism. I still had a nagging question of how could so many people be wrong for so many years and where were the "born againers" in the early times? I knew nothing about the history of Christianity and was told that there had always been "a remnant" of true believers who operated outside the Catholic Church in an "invisible church" so to speak.

Once, I got into a heated debate with a Catholic priest at the college I attended and argued with him about how the Eucharist was only symbolic and not to be taken literally. Now with the wisdom of age and grace of conversion, I realized how justified he was for becoming enraged at me. There was a lot at stake in this argument, not just a non-essential doctrine to use my own "personal interpretation" on.

During my teen years, I had been reading the Bible exclusively for three years and received my teachings from a radio Bible teacher who has since gone off into major heresy. It was from this anti-Catholic radio bible preacher that I learned my initial theology. I spent hours every night reading the Scriptures and listening to "Open Forum," a call-in radio show hosted by this self-proclaimed Bible authority. But in all my 17 years, I never once read the Catechism of the Catholic Church or any devotional Catholic literature or considered reading the history behind Christianity. So, here I was with my "radio bible theology degree" and three years of born again experience arguing with a Catholic priest who had spent 8 years studying theology and was pursuing a Ph.D. at the time.

As far as I was concerned, this was all I had to know about Christian history: Jesus came to earth, started a church which immediately went south and the Holy Spirit went on sabbatical for 1500 years. So for 1500 years, maybe the "Real Christian Church" went into hiding while the false Catholic church flourished and spread. (Incidentally changing the course of history of the civilized world along the way.) The only problem with this was that if I really believed that the early church apostasized, then the Gates of Hell did indeed prevail against it and Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. Unless of

course you continue to believe that the "invisible church" persisted in the background, kind of like a program that keeps running undetected in the background on your computer. The only problem with this theory is that the Church was meant to be a visible physical entity, set on a hill where it would be a light to the world, not hidden in the shadows waiting for a German Augustinian monk 1500 years later to unlock the Truth of the Bible for the world. The other problem that didn't bother me at the time was that there was no historical record of a "remnant hidden church." To be sure, there are records of short-lived heretical sects, cults and heterodox preachers, but no proof that any of them had any connection to the historical church that Christ started. There is a little book that claims the Catholic Church has systematically persecuted and suppressed the history of the "True Believers" ever since John the Baptist founded his church of true Baptist believers. It is this book that has fueled some of the "remnant" theories.

When my first wife died, no one could give me an answer for why she died when she had such faith and many young people from our church were devastated. Two days after my wife's death, I received a phone call and a familiar voice that I hadn't heard for years was on the line - my Catholic friend from college, now an ordained Catholic priest. I will never forget the comforting words he spoke: "Jesus gives us the privilege of sharing his suffering." He further said that Jesus stretched his arms out on the cross and said to my wife, "Elaine, you come up with me and share my suffering." He then quoted St. Paul when he talked about completing in his body the suffering of Christ. (Colossians 1:23) I couldn't argue since it was Scripture and it was the only thing that gave me comfort in those difficult months after she died. I had never heard a Protestant talk about that verse and somehow missed it in all my years of personal Bible study. My theology didn't allow for suffering but this Scripture given to me by a Catholic priest made more sense than anything I had heard or experienced in the past years. Since Christ our Redeemer had suffered should we too not be willing to take His yoke upon us and experience suffering? The Catholics call this "redemptive suffering" and if you really think about it, it resonates with all of human experience.

Several years later, I remarried. I met my 2nd wife at the same charismatic church I was attending. The stresses of becoming a new mother and wife were difficult for her and the practice of "worship and praise" was no longer providing her peace. In the past, we were taught that we should just "forget about our cares and worship the Lord" as the answer to our problems. Instead, my wife started reading about suffering from Mother Teresa, Teresa Liseux, St. John of the Cross and other Catholic mystics. She was finding much solace in Catholic teaching and she was slowly being drawn away from our evangelical/charismatic faith. For the first time in her life, she started to understand the value of pain and suffering

in the world and in the context of her own life. Catholic teachings brought her much comfort in these difficult times of our early marriage.

As much as I was happy that she was leaving the emotionalism of the charismatic church, I was troubled that it took Catholicism to give her true peace. This was at the peak of the priest sex-abuse scandals and I wanted nothing to do with the Church. I thought that Christ "could not possibly be the head of a church with sex abusers and pedophiles." These were the days when the daily headlines of all the papers were tallying the millions of dollars being spent on settlements and lawsuits in Boston and elsewhere. While we both attended our church services on Sundays, my wife attended her first Catholic Mass in 25 years at a weekday Mass. (She too had left the Catholic Church when she was 8 years old.) When the priest held up the consecrated Host and said "this is Jesus", she wept at the realization that this is the One she had been seeking all these years! My wife started to attend Mass on her own (she did not yet receive the Eucharist) and wanted to re-join the Catholic Church but I felt that it would be too confusing for our children. I couldn't argue however that it was slowly changing our marriage for the better as we both embraced trials in our life as a tool for good and not something to avoid and deny. I still was very reticent about Catholicism based on my past experiences and did not even consider joining the church. I asked her for the sake of unity in our marriage to stop pursuing Catholicism and she agreed to stop going to Mass.

When my Mom died unexpectedly. My brother and I took the long drive down together to start to clear out her house. He was beginning his master's degree in preparation for becoming a pastor at my previous charismatic church. I asked him about the statement in the Creed regarding "baptism for the forgiveness of sins." What did we believe as charismatics? Which baptism did this refer to? Was it the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second experience, was it water baptism? I had started to question my evangelical beliefs that I just took for granted for years without really thinking about them. Once a year we recited the Creed in our church but I realized that I didn't understand or hold too many of the statements in the Creed and was not aware of the fact that it was written by a group of Catholic Bishops at a Church Council 1600 years before. As we went through my mother's personal effects, I found prayer books, rosary beads, Mass cards and all the paraphernalia that I used to think was pagan and idolatrous. I suddenly realized that despite my Mom's lifelong struggles with depression, she really loved God and had a relationship with Him. As my brother and I went through her things I said to him "Hey, what if Mom was right after all and Catholicism is true?" He said "nah." I have no idea where that question came from but I have since realized that my conversion process was beginning then. He was going to toss her rosary beads in the garbage and I said "No, I'll

take them home for my wife, she's been leaning Catholic lately."

Even then, something started to stir in me as I carefully removed the beautiful wooden crucifix my parents always had on their wall above their bed and took it home. I realized that for all the contradiction and pain in their lives, their Catholic faith was more important to them than I had thought. That beautiful crucifix now hangs on the wall above our bed. Even more strange to me was a fairly frequent and almost palpable sense that my Mom was now praying for me! I couldn't explain it, but I felt it and knew it was true. I knew she prayed for me before she died but I had this very strange feeling that her prayers were drawing me back to the Catholic Church. I told my brother about this and I suspect he thought I had totally gone off the rails at this point. I never understood the Communion of Saints nor agreed with it but now I was experiencing the actual application of this communion in my life.

The charismatic church we were attending bought an entire theatre of tickets to see the first screening of Mel Gibson's "The Passion of Christ." In the middle of the movie as tears streamed down my face, I knew I had to come home to the Catholic Church as I saw so graphically displayed His love for me. If He could do this for me, I could overcome my pride and reticence about the Catholic Church and return in obedience to Him. To this day I don't know why or how I came to this conclusion.

My wife continued to long for Mass and I agreed to let her go to Mass as long as she would come with me to our church on Sunday morning with our children. She would often watch EWTN (a Catholic Network) and the "Journey Home Program." After seeing some of the conversion stories my interest was piqued. I was astonished to find there were so many former protestants with stories like mine converting to Catholicism. I asked my wife to get me those Catholic conversion stories of Marcus Grodi, Scott Hahn and others that I had asked her to get rid of 4 years before. She had attempted to show me a Scott Hahn video a few years before this but I found it too dry and too Catholic! This time it was as if the veil had been lifted from my eyes and I couldn't put these books down. When I read for the first time that it was the Catholic Church that decided on which books and letters should be in the Bible, that did it for me! I was now very angry that I had been misinformed for so long by anti-Catholic Protestants and I started to feel remorse for walking away from the Church without ever learning any of its true teachings. I also was angry that I had never met a Catholic in thirty years who could give me these basic true facts about the Catholic Church. I was embarrassed that as a relatively bright person with the ability to obtain a medical degree, I had never considered reading history and instead based my understanding of Church history from a 16-year-old "Bible Scholar" thirty years earlier. How could I be "so smart" and yet be so close-minded about something so important as my faith?

Suddenly, all the troublesome verses I didn't understand as a Protestant came alive with richness and meaning. I realized the Catholics take the Bible more literally than the evangelicals ever had. I always wondered how we got around John 6 when Jesus told us: "eat my body." Protestants insisted it was symbolic but the early church I found out believed that Christ truly became present at the Communion Table. Paul's description in Corinthians also made it clear to me that the Church believed in the real presence of Christ in the "breaking of the bread."

The paradox of Christians who said "the sinner's prayer" and continued to actively live sinful lives always bothered me, but Catholic theology made it clear that our earthly performance was important for salvation, but not the basis for it, as I had wrongly been taught they believed. This was further brought home to me when I now re-read Matthew 25 and realized that Christ himself said the only difference between the sheep (heaven-bound) and the goats (hell-bound) was what they did or didn't do! I now realized that after 30 years of Bible study, the sinner's prayer wasn't mentioned in the Scriptures as the "formula for salvation." The concept of venial and mortal sins made a lot of sense to me. How could a "white lie" really have the same temporal and eternal consequences as murder? The concept of the Communion of Saints which is in the Creed of Catholic and Protestants alike also became meaningful to me for the first time in my life. As I mentioned earlier, I had this distinct impression that my Mom who had died a year earlier was interceding for me and praying for me to go back to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has always taught that when a person dies they can continue to pray for those left behind, and since the "fervent effectual prayers of a righteous man availeth much" how much more now that they are in heaven beholding the face of God!

We started counseling with a local parish priest who led us back to the Catholic Church. At my first confession in over 35 years, tears started to fall as I heard those sweet words of absolution as if they were spoken from Christ himself. We then made our marriage vows before the Church and together we received Christ in the Eucharist. Jesus was saying to me "You have found what you have always been looking for and I am right here with you." As I knelt and prayed after receiving Him, I knew that I could never be closer to Him in this life than I was right then. The frustration of all those years of searching for Him and trying to find him outside of His church was over. I had finally come home.

Despite my lack of emotionalism, I have cried more tears of joy in the past two years than in most of my years of charismatic church life! I often choke up telling others about Christ in the Eucharist and often become teary-eyed thinking about how kind He is to have brought us back to His Church. My wife and I have experienced a spiritual oneness in our marriage that can only be described as supernatural. Before, we were always on opposite pages regarding spiritual issues and now not

only are we on the same page; we can't stop turning the pages together! I often chastise myself for leaving the Church as a young person but I am thankful for those years away because they prepared me to appreciate all the more, the Church, the Sacraments, and the love and respect for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

My heart aches for my ex-Catholic brothers and sisters who like me had left the truth of the Catholic Church without ever understanding it. I am grateful for the inspiration and encouragement to "follow hard after God" that I learned from my devout Protestant brothers. In particular, the charismatic Christians I have been privileged to know over the years have a devotion and love for God and one another that is truly amazing. I believe if they could only see the tremendous gift of His Real Presence in His Church, they would fall on their face before Him in the Eucharist. Their insatiable hunger for the presence of Christ could finally be completely satisfied in receiving him in the Eucharist. Father Benedict Groeschel of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal has said that the many church ladies from Pentecostal churches in the Bronx come to Eucharistic Adoration because they know their "sweet Lord Jesus" is there. I know my Protestant brothers and sisters would do the same once they discover He is truly present with us in the Eucharist, in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. □

*If you have any personal articles
or God's miracle in your life
you want to share with the devotees,
we may be reached at
the following e-mail addresses
and phone numbers:
eablp@aol.com and/or ladipatsee@gmail.com
(702) 274-4315 and/or (213) 364-8235*

Continued from Page 1

Recalling and Reliving the Passion

This practice of commemorating Jesus' passion was so esteemed that churches and monasteries in Europe began to establish reproductions of the holy sites. Thus, those who could not afford the long and arduous pilgrimage to the Holy Land could nevertheless experience a spiritual visit there. Two events further fostered this devotion. The first was the Crusades. Many people traveled to the Holy Land, and many more heard of their travels and longed to experience what they had described, if only in a symbolic manner.

The second stimulus occurred in 1342, when the shrines throughout the Holy Land were entrusted into the care of the Franciscan Friars. They prepared proper accommodations and obtained special indulgences for the pilgrims so that their visit would be as spiritual as possible. They also spread devotion to the passion of Jesus throughout the Christian world.

The Franciscans and Their Influence. Franciscans have always had a great love for anything associated with

the life and death of Jesus. St. Francis helped popularize the Christmas crib when he set up a living manger scene in Greccio, Italy, in 1223. He also loved to meditate upon the passion of Jesus, even writing his own Office of the Passion to commemorate it. Francis saw in the birth and death of Jesus the two key moments when Jesus' humanity and humility were most clearly visible. He saw in them the summit of Jesus' surrender to God, a surrender of total love.

St. Francis was so moved by this love that it became visible. When he was at Greccio, he was so inflamed with gratitude that those around him saw him holding the child Jesus in his arms, even though there was no child present at the scene. Likewise, when he was on Mt. Alvernia several months later, Francis received the stigmata, the very wounds of Jesus in his flesh, thus making his body a living remembrance of the passion. The lover, St. Francis, came to resemble the beloved.

From their very beginning, then, the Franciscans have seen it as their duty to foster devotion to the stations and the Christmas crib. At first, the stations that they built were located outside churches, but by the middle of the seventeenth century, they were being placed indoors instead. Franciscans were so identified with this devotion, in fact, that until recently they were the only ones who were given the privilege of blessing newly erected stations.

How to Pray the Stations. There are many different ways to pray the stations. Many parishes celebrate them as a community, especially during Lent. While suffering tends to separate and isolate us, commemorating Jesus' suffering as a community tends to bind us together. It makes us more fully one with him and with each other.

There are, of course, times when we pray the stations by ourselves, more as a silent meditation. Praying them in this way can be a deeply intimate experience, giving us the sense that we are walking alongside Jesus on his way to the cross.

The walking associated with the stations is also a form of prayer in itself. In a sense, we are praying with our feet. All too often we pray only with our minds. But walking the stations helps make our prayer more complete as we bring our bodies in line with our minds, similar to the way Jesus did on his way to Golgotha and the way Francis learned to do when he received the stigmata.

Remembering and Reliving. It's important to know that when we pray the stations, we are not only recalling ancient history. The Jewish people believe that by recounting a past event, we can somehow participate in that event. This is called anamnesis, and it is the basis for our understanding of the Mass. At the Eucharist, we are present in our own churches, but we are also somehow present at the Last Supper, before the cross, and at the empty tomb. We pass beyond our present time and mystically experience a bit of eternity.

This is also what we do when we pray the stations. We are not only telling the story, we are entering into it. Jesus' love for us as expressed in the stations and our love for him bridge the gap between what happened then and our lives today. We see Jesus fall under the weight of the cross and are horrified at his pain. We become Veronica and offer to wipe his face. We stand with Mary as she watches her beloved son die. No longer disinterested bystanders, we, like Francis, become united with Christ.

Our Passion. Jesus told his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him, and the stations give us the opportunity to do just that. We die to ourselves when we reflect upon our sin and remember that Jesus died for our forgiveness. As we remember the sufferings of Jesus, we can also recall how we have sinned against God and each other.

When we remember how Jesus was judged, we can ask whether we have misjudged others. As we commemorate the three falls of Jesus, we can recall the times we have fallen into sin as well as the times we have seen others fall and did not help them.

We also take up our cross in the stations by joining our sufferings to those of Jesus. Suffering often makes us feel as if we were upon a cross with no one to help us. But in the stations we are reminded who is on the other side of that cross: Jesus, who is always with us.

The stations can also encourage us to take up the cross of the challenge to live our faith in a more profound manner. They help us find the courage to reject those things that separate us from God's love, to be crucified to the world so that we can give ourselves to God and others more fully.

Finally, the stations offer us the opportunity to be in solidarity with the suffering of the world. When we pray the stations, we can exercise compassion—a word that means "to suffer with." We can take other people's suffering upon ourselves so that they no longer have to carry their burdens alone.

Never the Same Again. There are certain events in our lives that change us forever. The death of a loved one, a wondrous triumph, a new insight—all of these leave an indelible mark on us. The stations are just such an event. How could life be the same after we have experienced so much love? How could we look at ourselves or the world around us with the same eyes after having gazed upon the one who was pierced for our sins? Jesus literally loves us to death. How can we not be filled with overflowing gratitude and a willingness to live in that love?□

MEDITATION AND COMMENTARY

FOLLOW ME." (LUKE 5:27)

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These two words changed every-thing for Levi, for Simon and Andrew, for Philip, for unnamed disciples—and for us. Jesus is not pleading or begging. He is inviting, earnestly and lovingly. Follow him, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Follow him, who is the light in the darkness, the spring of water that never fails, the One who promises to guide you always.

Follow me. Not because you're particularly good or talented or holy. According to Jewish law, Levi was "impure" because of his association with Gentiles. He was also probably dishonest and greedy. Peter was impulsive, hotheaded, and stubborn. James and John wanted places of honor. All of the disciples had issues, but Jesus called them just the same -- just as he is calling you.

Follow me. For those who respond, the glory of those two words is summed up in Peter's first letter: Once you were no people, and you had not received mercy. But now you are God's people, and you have received mercy. Once you were in darkness, and now you are in God's wonderful light. You are chosen, royal, holy, a people belonging to God himself (1 Peter 2:9-10). That is who you are. That is how your heavenly Father sees you.

Follow me. It's true, you may not start out as an ideal disciple, but as you follow, your heart will begin to change. What you are now isn't an obstacle to what you can become -- not to the Lord. He has had a vision for your life from the moment you were conceived. And that vision is one of blessing, not of curse. It's a vision of fullness, not emptiness. It's a vision in which every part of your personality -- all of your talents, your character traits, and even your unique quirks—is filled with his life and is used to build his kingdom.

We all know that following Jesus has its ups and downs. But no matter what challenges we may face, we can always face them knowing that we belong to Jesus, and that he will never abandon us. For not only are we following Jesus; he is leading us, always calling us to his side with words of love and peace. □

"Yes, Jesus! I will follow you. I want to walk in your light every day of my life. I trust that you will bring to fulfillment all of your great and gracious plans for my life."

FROM THE PAGE TO THE HEART

EXPLORING AN ANCIENT WAY OF PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

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The person who thirsts for God eagerly studies and meditates on the inspired word, knowing that there he is certain to find the one for whom he thirsts (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Commentary on the Song of Songs, Sermon 23:3).

"I can't wait to go on vacation." "I'm looking forward to having lunch with you." "I'm closing a big sale next week." "I'm going shopping with my mom on Saturday." What do all of these statements have in common? They all speak with anticipation about something good that is going to happen.

So what does anticipation have to do with reading the Bible? Everything! There is a powerful link between the grace available in Scripture and our own faith. Put simply, the more we expect God to work in us when we read and pray the Bible, the more open we will be to hearing his voice and experiencing his presence.

Standing behind St. Bernard's words is the conviction that by seeking out the Lord in Scripture we will have an intimate experience of him. Bernard was convinced that

Scripture can draw us near to Jesus and have a profound impact on the way we love, the way we think, the words we speak, and the way we view the world. The more we connect with Bernard's words—thirsting, meditating, studying—the more we will encounter Jesus, and the more we will fall in love with him.

In this essay we want to turn our attention toward a method of praying through Scripture that opens us up to the intimacy Bernard wrote about.

The Promise of Scripture. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:16-17)

There is an ancient tradition in the church that is well known for its ability to open us up to revelation from the Lord. The method is called *lectio divina*, which means, "inspired reading." This method, which evolved in the

monasteries of Europe, is composed of four steps: Reading the word, meditating on the word, praying through the word, and contemplating the word.

At its foundation, *lectio divina* assumes that God has given the words of Scripture a special grace. While it is helpful to meditate and pray on the words of a saint or great doctor of the church, Scripture surpasses all of these writings in its ability to bring us to new and deeper levels of understanding and experience of the Lord. While we can receive great insights from reading someone like St. Teresa of Avila or St. Thomas Aquinas, only Scripture can act as a doorway into the very heart and mind of the Father.

Reading the Word. How do we practice this method called *lectio divina*? Before you begin, it's a good idea to get yourself in the right disposition. Find a quiet place where you can read and pray. Take your mind off of your responsibilities for these few minutes. Try to avoid any place where you might get interrupted. Then, take a few minutes to place yourself in the presence of the Lord. Ask Jesus to open the "eyes of your heart" as you fix your attention on him (Ephesians 3:17; Hebrews 12:1-2). Ask his Spirit to reveal to you the mysteries of heaven and to pour out God's love upon you. Finally, ask the Spirit to guide you in the way of truth (1 John 2:27).

Next, choose a passage from the Bible that you want to pray about. Some people begin with Genesis and work their way through the Bible. Others choose a specific book, such as Isaiah or the Letter to the Hebrews. Others prefer to work through the gospels, while still others prefer the epistles of Paul, John, or Peter. Where you go is entirely up to you—though it is helpful for beginners to go where they are most familiar, such as the gospels or the psalms.

When you have chosen a passage, read it a few times. You might even want to read it out loud, as this will help engage you more fully. If there are aspects of the passage that are puzzling to you, consult a reliable commentary or the Catechism. Whatever you do, be sure in this stage that you are coming to a good understanding of what the passage is saying.

How you read this passage can have a big impact on what you get out of it as well. It is best, as you read, to listen also. Listen for the still, small voice of God that longs to speak to you as personally as he did to Elijah long ago (1 Kings 19:11-13).

Meditating on the Word. It's this listening for the still, small voice of the Lord that helps move you from reading to meditation. It's one thing to understand the passage, whether through close reading or through the use of commentaries. It's another thing to ask the Holy Spirit to "open up" for you the words you have read and studied.

If one particular verse from the passage attracts you, spend time meditating upon it. Just as Mary "treasured and pondered" everything that Jesus said and did (Luke 2:19), we allow the words of Scripture to interact with our

own faith, thoughts, hopes, and desires. In this way, God's word becomes our own word—our own source of wisdom, hope, and purpose.

As you ponder the passage you have chosen, give your mind some freedom to go where it will. Don't try to force yourself to focus on something that is not moving your heart. This kind of experimentation is essential for anyone who wants to learn how to hear God's voice in Scripture.

Praying with the Word. Just as reading and studying give way to meditation, so too does meditation give way to prayer—to a heartfelt conversation with the One who reigns supreme over all the earth. In this kind of prayer, we offer to the Lord our words of praise, we thank him for his unlimited mercy, and we recount his many blessings.

One of the blessings of Scripture is that the words we meditate upon can provide the starting point for our prayer. As we praise and thank God, something amazing begins to happen. We find ourselves falling in love with the words of Scripture—the words that have opened us up to the presence and power of God. We also find that these words have meaning for our lives, as we discover that what happened to Paul, to David, or to Mary can happen to us as well. This sense that our lives can reflect the lives of Scripture's heroes and heroines excites us and moves us to love God even more.

For instance, as you read and meditate on the parable of the prodigal son, you may feel God's forgiveness for some sin that you once thought to be unforgivable. Or you may sense God telling you the very thing the father told his older son: "All I have is yours; come and receive it. Don't hold on to resentments and angers. Let them go and enjoy everything I have given to you."

By moving from meditation to prayer, we come to learn that the Bible is not meant to be only a historical document or a set of stories reserved for the Mass. It is the word of life, given by God to help all of us grow in our relationship with Jesus. This special role of the Scriptures is one of the key mysteries of our faith. It is not always easy to explain or understand why Scripture has this special ability—but it is clearly something that all of us can experience.

Contemplating the Word. Finally, prayer moves to contemplation. Like an elderly couple sitting together, quiet and peaceful, still in love after many years of marriage, we rest with the Lord. We are still and quiet in his presence. We know that he is our God. We are enjoying the sense of being showered with his love, and we simply receive.

In this final stage of *lectio divina*, few words are needed, if any. We are simply quiet, open to whatever God wants to say to us, surrendered to whatever he wants to do in our lives. At its deepest, we find ourselves sharing the same kind of communion with the Lord that Peter, James, and John had (Mark 9:2-8), the same experience that transformed the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-6), and the

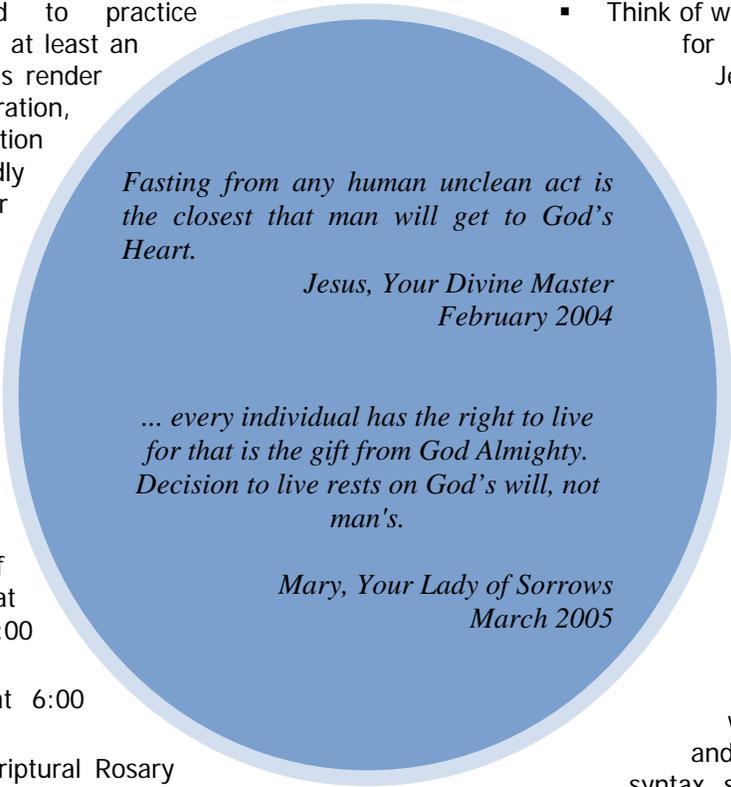
same communion that sustained St. Paul in all of his work (2 Corinthians 12:1-4) and St. John in his loneliness (Revelation 4-5).

Lectio divina may take some practice, but it is a glorious way to find God and deepen your relationship with him. As you devote this year to reading the Bible, experiment

with this ancient way of prayer and see what the Spirit might do in you. And always remember that St. Bernard's words are just as true today as they were when he wrote them nine hundred years ago. Those who thirst for God—through study and meditation and prayer -- will find the one they long to meet. That includes all of us. ☐

REMINDERS/ SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- You are enjoined to practice Eucharistic Adoration at least an hour a week. Let us render God adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition. Kindly check with your respective parishes for schedules. Some churches are open 24-hours for Eucharistic Adoration.
- Pray at least one rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary daily.
- Pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy at 3:00 PM and at 9:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Angelus at 6:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Pro-Life Scriptural Rosary [www.rosaryoftheunborn.com] to make reparation for the crime of abortion.



- Think of ways to make reparation to Mary for the sins committed against Jesus and Mary. A very good one is to join the **First Saturday devotion**; another is the **2000 Hail Mary devotion**.
- If you have any personal articles or God's miracle in your life you want to share with the devotees, we will gladly add it on those months when the article is relevant. Please submit your article by the second week of the present month so that it can be included in the next month's release. Write what's in your mind and heart and not worry about grammar, syntax, spelling or style. Our guardian angels in heaven and on earth will help us edit the article. ☐

ADDITIONAL REMINDERS FOR LENT

On all Fridays in Lent, one may receive a partial indulgence by reciting the Prayer Before A Crucifix before an image of Christ Crucified.

Spiritual Practices

- Practice humility in all your actions.
- Be generous, help someone in need.
- Look for ways to be helpful.
- Do a job that needs being done without being asked
- Be courageous, walk away from any impure situations.
- Don't be idle. Always be doing something for others or for your own spiritual growth.
- Say an extra Rosary for the conversion of a sinner.

- Visit someone who is sick or lonesome. Offer to say the Rosary with them.

Corporal or External Practices

- Take less of what you like and more of what you dislike at meals.
- Take nothing to drink between meals.
- Take nothing to eat between meals.
- Do not use seasoning on your food.
- Do not use any sweeteners with your food or drinks today.
- Avoid listening to the radio.
- Avoid any TV or videos; instead read the Passion of Christ in your Bible or Missal.
- Take only one helping of each item at meals.

THANK YOU

... a small and simple phrase that comes from a grateful heart!

Psalm 106:2

FOR PRAYERS HEARD AND PETITIONS GRANTED

Thank you, Eternal Father, for Your Will that transformed our sorrow into joy, our tears of anguish into tears of thanksgiving. Our physical and spiritual recreation, through Your Healing Hands, kept us enclosed and revived in our hope for renewed lives as we look up to the heavens praising You, in Jesus' most Holy Name, through the intercession of Mary, our Blessed Mother, and of the angels and saints.

Kyle Hampson is doing better!

The family and relatives of
Loida Malamug
thank you for including her
in your prayers.

Her doctor has told her that her
cancer is cured!

She will have surgery soon to
completely clean her from any
cancer cells

Please continue praying for her.

She is writing her testimony
and will send it soon.

Let us continue to thank God for their healing and for giving them the strength of faith to go through this spiritual process; and may their hearts be ever closer to Jesus' Sacred Heart through the intercession of the Blessed Mother in the Glory of Eternal Father. Amen.

2000 HAIL MARY DEVOTION

The Spiritual Army of God the Father and the 2000 Hail Mary Group of Northern California acknowledge with thanks our generous March sponsors of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion. We are grateful that we have merited their partnership and support in providing a venue of spirituality and fellowship for the devotees of our Blessed Mother. The devotion continues to be a constant success.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Betty Ayasao

Los Angeles, California

Vic, Alice & April Araneta

Lucy Barrios

Nory & Armando Jose

Loida Mance & Jim Wayda

Malou & Chong Mispenas

Alice Ng

Our Coordinator in the Philippines

Letty Rollan – Metro Manila

FOR DEAR VIC BATU

We,

*the Las Vegas/Laughlin
Chapter, wish you all the
best on your retirement
yet with heavy hearts, we bid
you farewell and thank you
for the four years of
extraordinary service
you have rendered.*

*Know that you will always
be with us in spirit as you
have given so much of your
time, talent, treasure and
energy to this group.*

*Our devotional prayers and
special celebrations will not be
the same without you and
it will be a long while
before any of us can even
attempt to replicate the service
you have rendered.*

*All the best in your
future endeavors, and please
keep in touch.*

IN MEMORIAM

In life and in death, we belong to God!

ROMANS 14:

CELERINA "CELY" PABLICO

BORN ON MARCH 28, 1944 | GONE HOME TO THE FATHER ON FEBRUARY 28, 2012

Many Times Pain Is the Voice Of God That Calls Our Attention and Focuses Our Love To His Waiting Sacred Heart. Whenever There Is Pain, There Is Hope.

-- St. Alphonsus Ligouri

My name is Celerina. I am a retired nurse and as such a living witness to so much of God's mercy and miraculous healing. I attended to patients struggling with their pain --

some persevere through it with so much hope and others with so much anger -- blaming and asking God, "why me?" Some get healed, go home and recover and get a new lease in life. Others go home to their creator, and still others stay and continue to seek treatment.



Like my patients, some persevered through the emotional roller coaster of caring for their sick while others just left them to the care of the doctors and nurses at the hospital.

When you are young and have a future you have planned to achieve for yourself and your son, thoughts of being a patient rather than a caregiver is far off from your mind. So I kept on working. Doing 12 to 18 hour shifts. I accumulated material possession beyond normal endeavors -- two houses when I only need one roof over my one head, a closet-full of clothes with matching shoes when I only have one body and one pair of feet. I traveled to places of interest around the world, hosted parties for friends and family -- I was so engrossed with this world, just like any other. Yes, I made it a point to go to Mass every Sunday with my

son -- out of obligation [and fear of eternal damnation] rather than faith and love for God. I prayed numerous novenas when I had problems or a great need for God's blessings -- making all sorts of promises. I talked to God often -- but I would find out later that God wanted more than that from me.

In 1997 I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had mastectomy on my left breast. I knew God would take care of me and He did. I went back to my daily grind after a couple of months of recuperation. Everything was going well -- being blessed even more -- with one, then two and then three grand babies -- all boys. Oh how I love them!

Nine years later, on March 29, 2006 my awakening came as a nightmare, I was diagnosed with aneurysm of the aorta -- a two-centimeter blockage in the major blood vessel that feeds blood to the body -- a rupture of which can cause life-threatening bleeding. I was given treatment but I continually lost weight and was lethargic. I oftentimes experienced shortness of breath. My family was alarmed. A cousin suggested that I see his friend, a "helper" of God, so he could pray over me. I shrugged off the suggestion.

On another family gathering, I crossed path with my cousin again. This time I decided I would give in to his plea. Although I don't seriously believe in his friend [and other "gifted helpers" and the like for that matter], this time I didn't think that there was any harm in "trying" his friend.

My initial meeting with the helper was not a pleasant encounter. His first spiritual proposition was that I go to confession -- and to which I ask why I should confess my sins to a priest [who are even more sinful than us laymen], when I can go directly to God. The helper told me that that should not be my concern because that is of God. He told me to just focus on my faith and my present dilemma. He went on to explain that priests are just instruments of God and confessing to one is an act of abandonment and humility before your God.

The helper then led me to a tiny meditation room (the "Sacred Room") where he recounted information about my life and past tribulations. I was also told that I would go through two more afflictions or tribulations. My initial reaction was hostile and "demanded" him that this time he should really pray for me. I requested for the Holy Oil, to which my cousin and

other people known to him attribute their physical healing. I was told that my heart needed more preparation to accept the works of God and therefore denied receiving it (Holy Oil). But I was asked, however, to come every Wednesday for healing prayers. I left, not really knowing what to think or believe nor feeling anything at all.

On June 21, I fainted and was rushed to the hospital where I was scheduled for an emergency aortic surgery. My CT scan revealed aneurysm of now seven centimeters. I was anemic and needed immediate blood transfusion.

My cardiologist gave me two options: an open heart surgery or an aortic stent. As a nurse, I am aware that an open heart surgery would result to more complications – the use of a respirator, even kidney and liver machines. Other than these, stroke is very imminent and recovery from the surgery is not guaranteed. On the other hand, an aortic stent graft is a less complicated procedure which generally allows the patient to leave the hospital sooner and recover more quickly, with less pain and lower risk of complications, and sometimes a lower risk of death.

I was faced with a lot of uncertainties. I had a difficult decision to make ahead of me. And as always, when faced with difficult situations, I turned to God. I prayed to the Infant Jesus for His will and His guidance. I discussed my medical options with my family and the unanimous decision was for an aortic stent.

On June 22, I was wheeled in to the operating room of UCLA Harbor Hospital at 6:00 p.m. At 2:00 a.m., I was in the recovery room hooked up to all kinds of machines and hallucinating. My son and my sister were there.

A few days later, I experienced extreme difficulty swallowing. The EENT specialist could not find anything wrong so all my doctors conferred and decided I needed a peripherally inserted central catheter ("PICC") line for a prolonged intravenous antibiotic treatment and high calorie intake. I was sent home after the PICC procedure and gradually started feeding on solid foods. Not too long after, my heart was failing again. I was rushed to Kaiser Panorama where doctors prescribed an esophageal fistula. A procedure that will ease food intake. My thoracic surgeon was unyielding to this procedure because of the proximity of the stent graft to the esophagus. I was told that consenting to such procedure, means risking death during the actual procedure.

It was at this very moment when I knew in my heart and in my mind that my only recourse was to completely surrender my whole being to my Creator and my God! I asked for a priest to hear my confession.

I was ready to risk my life at the operating table – God's will – a complete abandonment! Each of us can choose faith over worry, doubt and fear. Why? Because faith is a gift from God, it is not something that we have to juggle up ourselves. It is a powerful grace

that helps us hold the ground when difficulties of life come at us.

I met the helper again while I was still in my hospital bed. I was told I will overcome all these little by little and I will go home in seven days. I knew in my heart that it was God speaking to me through his helper – and faithful and true to His words; I was home in less than seven days!

I was told that on my way home from the hospital, I should go and light a candle in church. Also, I was to go to the Sacred Room for eight successive Wednesdays for healing prayers and on December 25, when the sun is up, I will rejoice!

Through all the eight successive healing prayer sessions on Wednesday evenings, I witnessed God's mercy and healing love touch so many others who sought Him in the Sacred Room. The helper praying over us lasted only a few minutes, but the effect was amazing. You could feel the love, spiritually flowing and I felt better physically as well. As my faith in and relationship with my God grew, my health conditions improved. *Without faith, it is impossible to please God, for anyone who approaches Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*

At noon on Christmas day, I was at the Sacred Room again – without my PICC line anymore, at peace and rejoicing!

Almost a year later, I was on a plane to Israel – and despite my best friend's skepticism that I will make it to the pilgrimage because of my health issues – I relived my Lord Jesus' life in Holy Land – walking uphill and downhill – basking in His goodness and glory!

Three months after, my best friend and I were on another pilgrimage -- to Medjugorje. And yes, I climbed the hills to the apparition site of our Lady. I made it with no difficulty at all!

In wellness though, we tend to forget the Lord. We know this is not the right way for us to go – but in our weakness we do anyway. Do you know of any mother who wouldn't come to the aid of her son? But as I provided the needed assistance, I was remised in taking care of God's temple – I neglected not only my physical but my spiritual being as well. God once more uses pain to bring me to a deeper need for Him.

I continue to battle physical, emotional and spiritual issues. But in all these ups and downs, one thing remains constant: My faith continues to grow and remains stronger than my fears and useless anxieties. *Each of us has a certain degree of faith. It may be deep and mature, or it may be superficial and new. It is important that we use all the faith we have – no matter how much that is! A half-hearted effort is not enough. We need to seek God with everything we have, according to the full level of our faith.*

Let us bring all our needs to the Father confident that He will not give us a snake when we ask for a fish, or a scorpion when we ask for an egg (Luke 11:11-12)!□

DEVOTION SCHEDULE



THE SPIRITUAL ARMY OF GOD THE FATHER

cordially invites you to the following devotions:

In Los Angeles:

1st Saturday Devotion

The Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | 501 N. Beaudry Avenue | (213) 250-7962
Holy Mass starts at 8:30 A.M. | 1st Saturday Devotional Prayers follow.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the Month

The Monastery of the Angels | 1977 Carmen Avenue on Gower | (323) 466-2186
11:20 A.M. - Rosary to the Father | 11:50 A.M. - Holy Mass
1:00 P.M. - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
Confession ongoing from 11:20 A.M. to 11:45 P.M.

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – March 17, 2012

at the Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | starting at 8:30 a.m.
Please call Mrs. Nory Jose at (310) 367-6557 if you wish to become a Sponsor of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion.

In Las Vegas:

1st Saturday Devotion

1st Saturday Devotional Prayers start at 1:00 P.M. | a Cenacle follows.

Devotion to God the Father

2:30 to 3:30 P.M.

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave | 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, | Las Vegas, NV 89117.
Please call Evelyn at (702) 274-4315 for entry to The Enclave or for more information.

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – March 24, 2012

Please call (702) 255-9616 or (702) 274-4315 for dates and venues for the coming months or for more information or if you wish to Sponsor the Devotion.

In Laughlin, Nevada:

1st Saturday Devotion

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church | 3055 El Mirage Way
Holy Mass starts at 8:00 A.M. Devotional prayers follow.

In Northern California:

1st Saturday Devotion

2000 Hail Mary Devotion

Please call (650) 766-2071 for dates and venues for the coming months or for more information.

For Sacramento:

Please call Precy Rieta (916) 564-3733 | Caring Sturgill (916) 897-3194 | Maria Rosario (916) 230-7756.

In San Diego

Rosary to the Father

Monday – Saturday after the 8:00 A.M. Mass [Look for Iris Haj]
St. Mary's Church | 1160 S. Broadway | Escondido, CA 92025

In the Philippines

2000 Hail Mary Devotion - Metro Manila Area

Letty Rollan has organized the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion in various areas of Metro Manila through the members of the "Mother Butler."

Please text Mobile @ **(011 +63 +2)** 916- 384-9300 and/or | Landline 939-4677 to find the venue closest to you.