



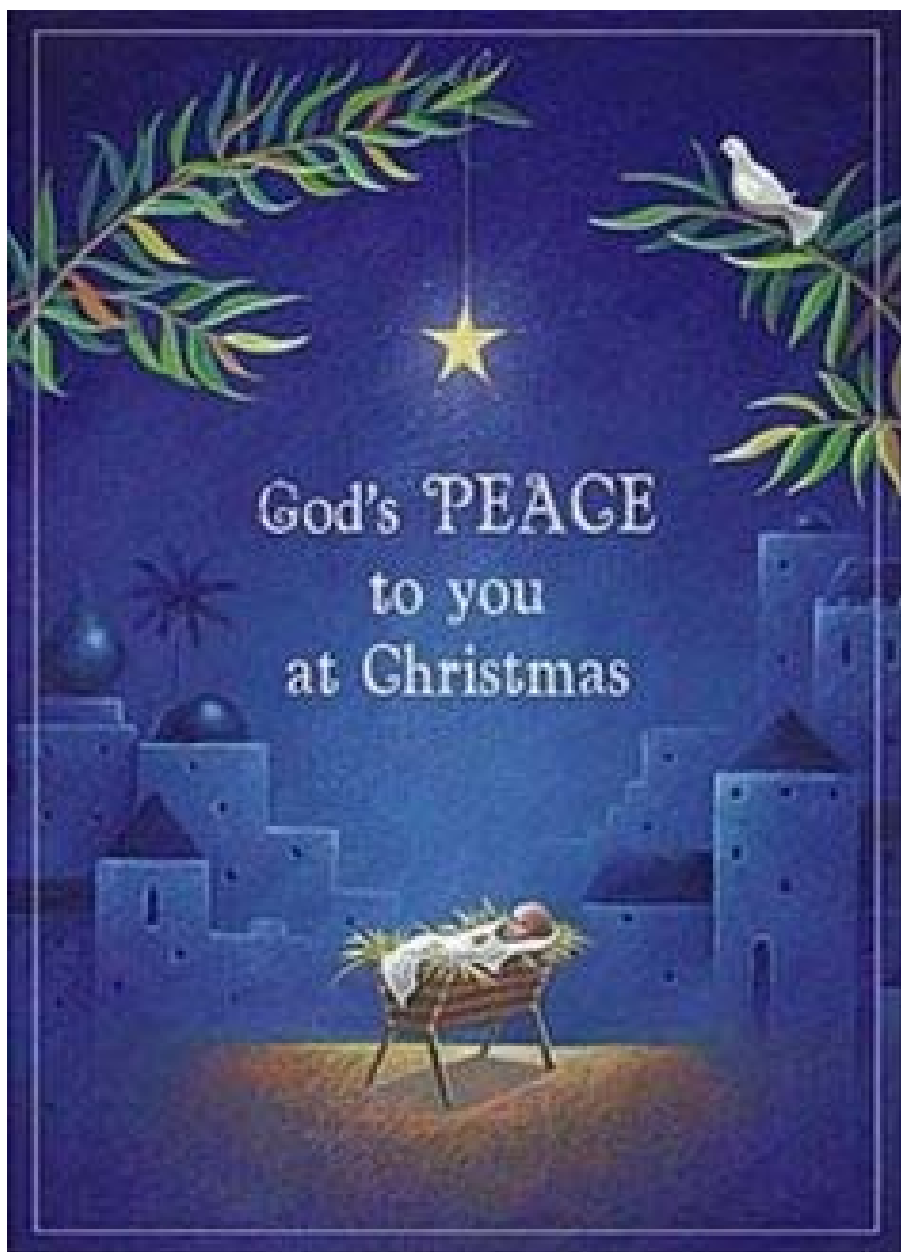
1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION NEWSLETTER

December 2015

In this Issue

Overview for the Month	
Feasts for December	2
Highlights of the Month	3
God Touched Me	6
Spiritual Army News Dispatch	7
Spiritual Enrichment Recommended	8
Thank You	11
Devotion Schedule	

THE EDITORS OF THE SPIRITUAL ARMY OF GOD THE FATHER'S 1ST SATURDAY NEWSLETTER ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING THE CONSISTENT QUALITY AND ACCURACY OF THE SPIRITUAL ARMY OF GOD THE FATHER'S 1ST SATURDAY NEWSLETTER AND AS SUCH RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REJECT OR EDIT THE CONTENT OF ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR PUBLICATION. EDITING MAY INCLUDE, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO, CHANGES TO GRAMMAR, SYNTAX AND STYLES, REMOVAL OF OFFENSIVE CONTENT AND REMOVAL OF PERSONAL NON-PUBLIC INFORMATION. SUBMISSION OF YOUR ARTICLE SIGNIFIES YOUR AGREEMENT TO THE TERMS AFOREMENTIONED.



OVERVIEW FOR THE MONTH

www.catholicculture.org

The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which is celebrated on December 8. The first 24 days of December fall during the liturgical season known as Advent and are represented by the liturgical color purple. The remaining days of December mark the beginning of the Christmas season. The liturgical color changes to white or gold — a symbol of joy, purity and innocence.

The liturgy of Advent focuses on remembering Christ's first coming at Bethlehem which then directs our mind to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. The readings focus on the people of the Old Testament awaiting the Messiah, John the Baptist, heralding the way for Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary and her maternal preparations. □

FEASTS FOR DECEMBER

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

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 3 Francis Xavier, Memorial | 25 Christmas, Solemnity |
| 6 Second Sunday of Advent, Sunday | 26 Stephen, Feast |
| 7 Ambrose, Memorial | 27 Holy Family, Feast |
| 8 Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patronal Feast day of the United States of America , Solemnity | 28 Holy Innocents, Feast |
| 11 Damasus I, Opt. Mem. | 29 Thomas Becket, Opt. Mem. |
| 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe (USA), Feast | 31 Sylvester I, Opt. Mem. |
| 13 Third Sunday of Advent, Sunday | |
| 14 John of the Cross, Memorial | |
| 20 Fourth Sunday of Advent, Sunday | |
| 21 Peter Canisius, Opt. Mem. | |
| 23 John of Kanty, Opt. Mem. | |
| 24 Christmas Eve, Sunday | |

The feasts of St. Nicholas (December 6), St. Lucy (December 13) are superseded by the Sunday liturgy. The feast of the St. John the Evangelist (December 27) is superseded by the feast of the Holy Family. □



"..... I am your Mother Mary

When you are praying my beads of rosary, plead before God Almighty your love for peace and love for each human being. Unless humanity recognizes God as Creator and protector of all and the passion of my son Jesus as the center of God's love and salvation of mankind, the power of the evil one to inflict chaos, death and disarray will continue to prevail.

In the days ahead, the effects of humanity's disobedience and disbelief will be felt from different places, oceans and the place where you are.

Be constant in prayer my children and hold my beads tight on your hearts.

Thank you for listening to me, I love you my children."

Mary , Your Lady of the Rosary

121215



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

REFLECTIONS OF THE MEANING AND LESSON OF CHRISTMAS

By Bishop Thomas G. Dolan

For a long time now many people have written in this or a similar vein — that it is too bad that the Christmas season has become as much a celebration of exuberant consumerism as it is the celebration of the Incarnation. It strikes many as odd that the coming of Christ as a poor and humble child should somehow become an occasion for profligate consumption and, frequently, self-indulgence.

We wonder why it has come to this, and so we resolve that next year it will be different. But it will not be different unless we, ourselves, become different. Instead, it is likely that out of habit and momentum we will be more caught up than ever in the frenzy, until at last we mercifully reach the point we can no longer shop lest we drop. And so we give it all up as a bad job. Then a time of great anticipation and joy becomes for us an occasion fraught with frustration and disappointment. Merry Christmas, indeed!

Actually, these feelings about trying to escape the consumer binge do credit to those who experience them. It is, to be sure, important to keep in mind “the reason for the season.”

When we do that, we move closer not only to the meaning of Christmas but to the traditions regarding its celebration. Christmas giving goes back to a time when Christians gave one another small gifts in celebration and in imitation of God’s great gift to us, which is the incarnation of Christ.

We do not like to think in theological terms in this age when we are so preoccupied with other questions, but God could have made known His salvation in any way He chose. Think about it: He could have come bounding from the heavens as a magnificent, awesome, kingly figure. Instead, He chose to be born of a humble couple in straitened circumstances, far from home and out of money — and, indeed, out of luck because there was no room for them in the travelers’ lodge. And so, as a result of mean circumstances to which he submitted, he was born in a stable. The simplicity of that birth has given Christians ever since pause to realize that God chose to communicate the great mystery of His love and mercy by sending us the least threatening divine presence we can imagine — a small child totally dependent on his parents.

This was the beginning of a great problem for those who wanted a Wonder Counselor, Lord Mighty God, Father of the World to Come, Prince of Peace, King of All. The Jews had longed for a Messiah who would be a prophet like Moses, only greater. They longed for a savior who would lead his people to military and material victory over all their enemies, subjugate those enemies, and give the chosen ones wealth and power in their world.

It is only with difficulty and over time that some of them eventually came to grips with the fact that Jesus, born in the stable at Bethlehem, fulfills every prophesy made about the Messiah in the Old Testament, and yet did so in a way totally unexpected by the wise and the prudent of the generation to which he was born.

Today we glory in our knowledge (though not, it must be said, in our wisdom) and we are bedazzled by the myth that knowledge is power. It is Christmas that can remind us, if we choose to be reminded, that power is borne of weakness and strength of humility, and that the meek ultimately do and should inherit the earth.

So I say that in the midst of all our Christmas preparations we should take time to realize who is born on Christmas Day. A sign of our subtle inversion of values is the practice that has grown up of celebrating Christmas for children on December 24. Instead of the first Mass for Christmas at midnight, we have the so-called Santa Claus Masses at 4 or 5 in the afternoon, so that the children do not have to be bothered with thinking about Jesus and his birth on Christmas Day itself. This, of course, is a great convenience for parents and I sympathize with them in their acceptance of what basically is an anti-Christmas practice.

We should all realize that Christmas is a time when God in his humility shows us, if not who we are, at least what we should strive to be.

In that spirit we should extend ourselves in yearlong gift-giving, not offering immense gifts and fabulous benisons, but in providing little things that, one by one, make our neighbor’s lives holier, healthier and happier. □

Thomas George Dolan (born February 20, 1936), is a retired American prelate of the Roman Catholic Church who served as the eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois from 1994 to 2012.

IMITATING THE HOLY FAMILY FOUR TRAITS THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE

www.wau.org

Reprinted with Permission

Like many parents, every day my wife and I face real and challenging issues in our family. We have two teenage sons and three younger children. Like many families, our children fight and bicker.

Sometimes they are loving and kind, but at other times they are disrespectful. Sometimes they resist doing chores and homework.

In addition to these very common problems with our children, my wife and I have to balance work and family life, make educational decisions for our kids, track our finances, and work through marital disagreements. This is our life! While we would never trade any of our kids (at least not most days!), each day presents its own set of dilemmas along with plenty of tension.

This reality stands in stark contrast to the perception of the Holy Family that I cherished as a child. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph seemed to have such a peaceful existence. After all, Mary and Jesus never sinned, and Joseph behaved like a saint! This makes it easy to dismiss the “Holy Family” as passé or irrelevant in today’s world.

That’s why it’s so vital not to settle for a shallow understanding of the Holy Family! Even though they lived in a different age and culture, the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph can bring us hope by showing us how we too can live as a “holy family.”

Beset with Trials. Joseph and Mary faced real problems, even serious crises that families typically don’t confront. Imagine how you would feel if armed soldiers were searching house to house for your son or daughter, intent on murdering your child! Fear, rage, and bitterness might grip you, not just for days but for years. This is just one of the trials that Mary and Joseph endured. Afraid for their son’s life, they fled their home and the only country they had ever known. Later they had to forgive those who had threatened them lest they be bound by bitterness.

Even before Jesus’ birth, Mary had already endured trial. Many in her town may well have known of her pregnancy outside of marriage. Rumors in a small town can be vicious, and Mary was likely the butt of various jokes and gossip from those with whom she had grown up. All of this before facing the normal struggles of raising a son!

Jesus’ parents also faced financial pressures. Because Jesus had been born into relative poverty, there was barely enough money to pay for even the least expensive Jewish circumcision. Living modestly was the rule by which they lived. They had to be frugal and still tithe. Then, as their son turned twelve, they faced perhaps their greatest scare: a runaway child!

If one of your children were missing for several days, wouldn’t fear and guilt consume you? For days, Mary and Joseph must have battled the condemning thoughts that any parents would face in a similar situation: Will we ever find our son again? Is he hurt? Why didn’t I keep him with me? Did he run off intentionally?

Can We Become a Holy Family? So, if Mary and Joseph faced trials just like ours, then what exactly is a “holy family”? And how are we supposed to live like them? First of all, even though much of their lives involved mundane routine, Joseph and Mary had a sense of God’s call and plan for their lives. They knew that in raising Jesus, they played a unique role in God’s plan. Even during the worst times, they couldn’t escape the fact that God’s hand was on their lives in a special way.

Of course, while no mother or father will ever again raise the incarnate Son of God as their own child, every husband and wife should have a similar sense of God’s plan for their family. God has called each family together uniquely; no one else has been given the opportunity to love and raise your children. We must find that sense of awe even during the “dog days” of sibling rivalry and financial stress. God has called you personally!

Mary and Joseph’s relationship wasn’t based on common interests or similar personalities. While they may have been very compatible, this wasn’t the basis of their unity. Their relationship with God was the foundation of their marriage, and it was this strength that held them together during trials. Similarly, it is vital that in our homes, at least one parent — if not both — find their strength through a relationship with God.

Husbands and wives don’t always approach their faith in the same way. Often (but not always!), wives have a deeper sense of the need for God’s presence in the family. In these situations, perhaps only the wife will find her strength through prayer. Single parents especially need to turn to the Lord for the energy and wisdom to raise their children.

Whatever the circumstances, it is a blessing when one parent deepens in his or her faith walk with God. During trials, the faith of one parent will produce strength and peace for the whole family. Of course, it’s best when both parents are seeking to wholeheartedly follow the Lord.

Set Apart for God. Another aspect of being a “holy family” is that we have an awareness that we have been set apart for God to live out his call and build his kingdom. When we possess such an awareness, our lives will naturally reflect a different set of priorities than those

held by most other people in the world. We don't need to own the most possessions. We don't need our children to win every game or academic award. We won't find our security in the pursuits that many others desire.

Instead, being a holy family means that we try to obey God in all of our decisions. God is not simply our co-pilot, helping us out during those few times when we call upon him. Instead, we want each decision that we make — whether it involves parental discipline or family dinners — to be pleasing to him. We want to listen to God and live in the way that he wants us to live. This is what it means to be “set apart for God.”

We want to trust God, especially in the midst of the most difficult situations. When our kids are behaving badly and we don't know how to respond, when the funds in our checkbooks are low and the fuses are short in our marriage, we want to find a way to obey God's will in our relationships. This is what it means to be a holy family.

Another important aspect of living as a holy family involves repentance and prayer. Many of us recall the movie that defined today's definition of repentance: “Love means never having to say you're sorry.” Oh, if this were only the case! If you and I are to have a holy and loving family, then the exact opposite is true.

Love means seeking and offering forgiveness on a regular basis. Love means not holding grudges and angers. Love means recognizing when I have wronged my spouse and making sure that our relationship hasn't been damaged. Repentance in a marriage is one of the most beautiful gifts from heaven. It softens the heart of the offended, and it heals the hurt in a relationship. We would all do well to practice repentance and forgiveness and to teach our children to do the same.

A holy family also means that we will find ways to pray together as a family. We find this difficult with our kids, especially our teenagers. But in the long run, short times of family prayer combined with family attendance and participation at Mass will have a positive impact on our children. As Mother Teresa used to say, “The family that prays together stays together.”

Each Family Is Unique. I know some families who really are holy. One couple has raised six children, one of

whom is disabled. During these last twenty-five years, they have encouraged each of their children, including their disabled daughter, to follow the Lord and to develop their unique gifts. Most importantly, their life and love witness to a vibrant faith.

I am a close friend of another couple who don't see eye to eye on a host of issues, but they too are holy. Both had been widowed, and combining two separate families into one was a real trial for them. They brought together different parenting philosophies and strategies for discipline, and sometimes their views conflicted severely. But because of their willingness to repent and forgive each other and because they sought God's way over their own, their children have experienced a beautiful home life.

A third couple is struggling with a strong-willed child. Even though they don't have any magic answers, they are trying to learn how to help their daughter. Her angry outbursts and moods can negatively affect the atmosphere of the whole family. However, this couple has told me that their daughter has taught them how much they need God as the foundation of their family. They too are a holy family.

The strengths and weaknesses of each family differ greatly. But in every case, they are holy because they are trying to put Jesus first in their lives as best they can. One or both parents are seeking God in prayer. They are trying to make love and encouragement flow in their homes more than criticism and negativity. They are doing their best to teach their children how to repent to one another. And in every case, as a family, they attend weekly Mass.

Of course there will be moments when we fall short. At those times, we may even begin to wonder whether it's worth trying to imitate the Holy Family. Remember, however, that God is pleased with our faithfulness. While we tend to focus on our failures, he sees the intentions of our heart. When things aren't going well, it's tempting to throw up our hands in despair. Instead, we can call upon God in each moment of the day, asking him to bless our efforts to be a family that witnesses to his life and love. □

GOD TOUCHED ME

GOD'S GRACE AND MY JOURNEY TO THE EUCHARIST

By Gerrard Gier, a devotee

"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

- Romans 6:3-4

Being born and raised in Hawaii, I remember going to church at a young age. I never knew much of the Catholic faith, but I did know I was baptized. I remember my mom taking all five of us children, while my dad stayed home and watched football. My family was very much the "athletic family" and as we got older, sports became the normal weekend activity. With all five children in different various sports, my parents would "divide and conquer" to make sure at least one parent would be able to watch at least one game from the whole weekend. The more we excelled in our sports, the less we went to church. Unfortunately, going to church did not remain a priority. But the #1 thing that we always did, was always eating dinner together as a family, and always saying grace. Little did I realize how much of God's grace was in my life.

Even though we were not attending church, I always continued practicing good, moral values. If you've ever been to Hawaii, I'm sure you've witnessed (or at least heard about) the "aloha spirit." It wasn't until I was older that I realized that this same aloha spirit was very similar to the teachings of the Catholic faith – practicing the "golden rule" in treating others the way that you would want to be treated, appreciating whatever gifts have been given to you, putting others first, and giving of yourself and not expecting anything in return. Looking back now, I see that this aloha spirit that I carried with me in how I treated others, was very much rooted in the Catholic faith.

Throughout high school and college I was always interested in religion. I would attend church at various Christian denominations with different friends, including catholic ones. During my junior/senior year in college, one professor had watched me play baseball. He approached me after the game and said, "If you ever need to take an elective (class), you should take my religion class. I think you would like it." There were not

many classes I got an "A" in, but for this particular class, I did earn an "A." I thoroughly enjoyed the class and looking back, it probably sparked a spiritual ember inside of me.

I had dreams of playing professional baseball, but an injury during towards the end of my senior year changed all that – I had come to the realization that this would not be my path.

I went back to school and got my Master's degree. I had a great first job upon completing my graduate studies, but unfortunately, got laid off. Shortly thereafter, I found an even better job. This pattern of getting laid off, but then finding a better job continued four times!

To me, that's being very blessed . . . that there was a "higher power" watching over me. Was that usually the case? Getting laid off and finding a better job after? I believe that I can only control what I can control. I try to be the best in everything I do, trying to give more than I receive, and just "going with the flow." There's a Hawaiian song "Just Along For The Ride." I can see myself in a canoe, just traveling and seeing where the ocean waves take me. You can only paddle so much, but the ocean is so vast. To get where you wanna go, you've got to work with whatever current you get. Again, you can only control what you can control . . . the rest you'll just have to trust and go by faith.

I met my future wife shortly after my second layoff. I was living alone and with no job. After I started dating her, I came to find out that she was teaching religious education to grade school kids at her church. I was happy that she was grounded in her faith, attending church regularly. Her faith was one of the things I admired most about her. When things got serious, I went decided it was time to look for a job again, and again through God's grace (although I didn't realize it at the time), found one right away.



Continued on Page 9

SPIRITUAL ARMY NEWS DISPATCH

POPE SAYS YEAR OF MERCY WILL BE TIME TO HEAL, TO HELP, TO FORGIVE

Excerpted from: Catholic News Service | Cindy Wooden | April 13, 2015

Before celebrating vespers on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 11, 2015, Pope Francis released a 9,300-word document officially proclaiming the 2015-2016 extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy.

In his document, Pope Francis said "Mercy is what makes God perfect and all-powerful. If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected," the pope wrote in "Misericordiae Vultus," ("The Face of Mercy"), which is the "bull of indiction" calling a Holy Year to begin Dec. 8.

In his homily at vespers, the pope said he proclaimed the Year of Mercy because "it is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone the way of forgiveness and reconciliation."

The Old Testament stories of how God repeatedly offered mercy to his unfaithful people and the New Testament stories of Jesus' compassion, healing and mercy demonstrate, the pope said, that "the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality through which he reveals his love," just like mothers and fathers love their children.

"How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God," he wrote. "May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst."

Pope Francis asked that all dioceses around the world designate a "Door of Mercy" at their cathedral or another special church or shrine, to be opened on December 8 which is the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. And that every diocese implement the "24 Hours for the Lord" initiative on the Friday and Saturday before the fourth week of Lent.

The pope said he will designate and send out "Missionaries of Mercy" to preach about mercy; they will be given special authority, he said, "to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See."

And he urged all Catholics to spend more time practicing what traditionally have been called the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Mercy, he said, is "the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sins." That bridge was made concrete when God chose Mary to be the mother of his son.

The Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wrote, is also a way to keep the Second Vatican Council alive. "The walls which too long had made the church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way," he said. The council recognized "a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father's love in the world."

Continued on Page 9

UPCOMING EVENTS

TOY DRIVE FOR THE LOS ANGELES CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

PLEASE DROP OFF
YOUR NEW UNWRAPPED TOYS
EVERY 1ST AND 3RD SATURDAYS AT
THE CONVENT OF
THE SISTER DISCIPLES OF
THE DIVINE MASTER

FEAST OF THE INFANT JESUS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 2016
ST. FRANCIS DE SALES PARISH
1111 MICHAEL WAY
LAS VEGAS, NV

PILGRIMAGE TO HOLY LAND & JORDAN

DECEMBER 5-15, 2016
DAILY ACTIVITIES AND OTHER
INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE AT
WWW.SPIRITUALARMYOFMERCY.ORG

SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT RECOMMENDED

KEEPING AWAKE TO WAIT

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake!

- Mark 13:24-37

By David Henson

Keep awake! And be watchful for the best deals on flat screen televisions, for they will come and go like a thief in the night. Keep awake! Two will be shopping, but only one will be taken into the paradise of door-busting discounts. Keep awake! And the peace of a peppermint mocha and the grace of our Starbucks will be with you always, for the coffee shop will remain open all night to fuel the delirium of fevered consumerism. Keep awake! For you know both the day and the hour when the master of American consumerism will return. Keep awake! For Black Friday now begins on Thursday.

Keep awake! This command that Jesus gives during the Olivet discourse, as recorded in Mark, is echoed throughout the gospels and early Christian texts. This refrain speaks to the sense of expectation and watchfulness as believers awaited the imminent second coming of Christ. Throughout these texts, writers are extolling Christians to keep awake and be alert for the return of the Lord, a theme addressed by many of the Gospel parables (Parable of the Talents, Parable of the Bridesmaids, and others). The fervent need to keep awake says a great deal about early Christians' understanding of not only their persecution but also of the eschaton. While much of the rhetoric of imminent return has been explained away by later Christians, the command to keep awake remains one of the few commands of our Lord that Americans still manage to keep. We keep awake as much as possible—and more. Statistics from the Centers of Disease Control show that about one-third of Americans are sleep-deprived and at least one-third report unintentionally falling asleep during the day. We are an exhausted people.

And yet, we keep awake. Indeed, we need to keep awake as we work longer hours for less while trying to balance our family and spiritual lives. Thankfully, there are whole cottage industries devoted to keep us awake, and the success of coffee shops, energy drinks, and even caffeinated water are all based on the need to keep overworked, sleep-deprived Americans awake, alert, producing, and consuming to keep our economy humming. It's no surprise that the popularity of tea and coffee spiked around the time of the Industrial Revolution when workers needed to be kept awake in order to keep up with tireless machines so they might work longer hours at menial, repetitive tasks. And now there are

computers, robots, and outsourcing to keep pace with. Keep awake!

Nowhere, of course, is this American devotion to consumption and keeping awake more apparent than on Black Friday when Americans brave the cold and the dark, fighting crowds and crankiness to stand in line for cheap toys and overpriced electronics at hours when they would normally be snug in their beds with visions of sugarplums.

Keep awake! And completely miss the point. Americans keep awake only so that we can keep consuming, so that we can fill our lives with ever more stuff and ever more busyness. We stay awake on Black Friday to buy more or to stand in more and longer lines. On other days, we stay awake to surf the Internet mindlessly, check our work e-mail from home while we give our children baths, or work a few extra hours because the house feels too lonely. We keep awake, keep moving, keep consuming as much and as quickly as possible so we can get lost in the succor of noise and department store lights that masks our deep spiritual lack, our profound loneliness and our agitated listlessness.

But the command of Jesus isn't to keep awake and keep moving. Rather it is to keep awake. And to wait. And wait. And wait still.

This is the discipline of Advent, and, in some ways in our modern culture of frenetic activity, it is more difficult even than the penitence and denial of Lent.

Time is money and waiting is costly. The Industrial Revolution and much of our current economy is predicated on the idea of streamlining processes to eliminate waiting along the production line. But it's not just a symptom of modernity. The siren song of midnight shopping dates back to antiquity during the first-ever recorded Black Friday, of sorts at least.

See, there were once ten bridesmaids who could not keep awake while waiting on a long-delayed bridegroom. They were supposed to keep awake to welcome the bridegroom, but all had failed. Echoing the experiences of the disciples, who could not keep awake while Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, the bridesmaids fell asleep.

In the darkness of midnight, however, a cry came out that the bridegroom was arriving. Doors were thrown open. There was excitement and confusion as the

bridesmaids scrambled to find their oil lamps in the pitch black night. Finally, five of the bridesmaids managed to light their lamps, and their faces, with the betrayal of sleep still lining their cheeks and eyes, flared to life in the firelight, beacons to the bridegroom.

Keep awake and light your lamps!

These bridesmaids saw their own smoldering lamps and then they saw their friends' lamps shining brightly: a brighter television screen, a shinier car, a shimmering mirage of needs. And they believed their lamps were not enough. Indeed, they thought their lamps more important than themselves — that without lit lamps, they had no identity at all. In that moment, they measured their worth by how much they owned.

And this is what made these bridesmaids so very foolish. They left when they should have remained. But what faith it would have taken to wake, and realizing their lack, to wait still, in frailty, in honesty, in transparency. What devotion it would have taken to wait on the bridegroom while their unlit lamps betrayed them. What trust in the bridegroom it would have required to believe that his love would have overlooked their lack, that his blazing light would have so dwarfed all other lights as to render them irrelevant.

It would have taken great faith to keep awake and wait. But it is hard to wait in the darkness. It is terrifying to wait, exposed by our need, our emptiness, our humanity. It is hard to wait when we feel like nothing we have or do will ever be enough.

It is much easier to scramble around shopping as we attempt to fill our lives and the season of Advent with so much stuff that we never have to look away from the glare and glitz of consumerism to see our own thinly burning lamps. How much easier it is to keep awake, keep moving, and to keep shopping. But the call of Advent is to keep awake and keep waiting on the coming of Christ. It is a call to keep awake and keep trusting in that coming, no matter how long the delay, no matter how ill-prepared we are or how insufficient our faith, our lights.

It is hard to hear such a call amid the siren song of Christmas consumerism when the season of Advent refuses to shout down the competition. The stillness of Advent is content to be ignored while it whispers for us to keep awake, and to wait, and to wait still, until we can hear it. This waiting, this willing long-suffering, is the quiet, gentle, resilient, and patient power of the God of Advent.

The remaining five, however, did not have enough oil. They stood, terrified, in the shadows cast by the beatifically lit faces of their five friends. The five without oil asked with growing desperation whether they might all share what was left of the oil. The five with bright lights, though, had a good deal going and they weren't about to let go of anything they owned because perhaps — perhaps! — there would not be enough for everyone.

Instead, they suggested the five without oil go to wake the dealers in the dead of night and buy some extra oil.

Keep awake and go shopping!

And at their peril, the five without oil left. In the dark and in the cold, they left their friends, the house, and the approaching bridegroom to bust down the doors of sleeping oil dealers and shop for oil. These bridesmaids, up until that moment, had done nothing wrong. They had been no less watchful than their counterparts. That had all failed to keep awake. But when they finally did wake at the approach of the long-awaited bridal couple, they failed to wait. They awoke and kept moving. □

David Henson received his Master of Arts from Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, after receiving a Lilly Grant for religious education for journalist. He is currently a postulant for the priesthood in the Episcopal Church.

Continued from Page 1

POPE SAYS YEAR OF MERCY

Recognizing that they have been treated with mercy by God, he said, Christians are obliged to treat others with mercy. In fact, the Gospel says that Christians will be judged by the mercy they show others.

“At times how hard it seems to forgive,” he said. “And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”

Pope Francis also noted that God's mercy is an important theme in Judaism and Islam, and he urged efforts during the Year of Mercy to increase interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding with followers of both faiths. □

Continued from Page 6

GOD'S GRACE AND MY JOURNEY TO THE EUCHARIST

We agreed when we had children, they would be raised Catholic . . . and so began the tangible and visible beginnings of my walk towards a deeper Catholic faith. We got married in a Catholic church a year after being engaged. Our first child was baptized in the same church we had gotten married at. And when our second child came along, was baptized at the same church as well. Although we agreed the children would be raised catholic, my wife never bugged me about attending mass every Sunday. Her only request was that on special occasions, such as Easter and Christmas, we could attend mass together as a family. Of course I obliged.

As the children grew older it was time for our eldest child to begin taking classes towards receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Our youngest was not old enough to join in religious education classes, however, was enrolled in the pre-school of our local

parish. The path of their faith journeys were beginning as well. My kids were learning the Catholic faith, but I did not know much about it.

I aspire to be a great father, to ground our children in the Catholic faith. But in order to do that, I felt that I had to "practice what I preached." How could they grow in their faith, when their own father did not practice the faith? I did not want to talk about anything that I didn't know about. But God had a plan for me!

Our youngest child was enrolled at the parish preschool in August of 2013. Our oldest was enrolled in sacrament preparation soon after in September. Then that October, my wife and I attended the Marriage Enrichment Weekend Retreat at St. Paul the Apostle in Chino Hills. This weekend retreat would be the next stepping stone in all our faith journeys.

The weekend was to culminate that Sunday afternoon with a beautiful mass offered for the entire families of all the couples. That afternoon before the mass, my wife and I made our commitment to God – from this day forward, we will attend mass every Sunday altogether as a family.

It touched me in that moment because it made me remember my childhood and attending church with my mom and siblings, with my dad at home. I asked myself, "Am I participating and 'present' in my family?" To be a great father means I have to be involved and present in all parts of our family life, including raising our children in the Catholic faith. I have to make sure they are attending mass and that I'm able to answer their questions of faith.

Attending mass every Sunday felt both familiar to me, and in some aspects, new to me as well. Everyone once in a while I would ask my wife what something particular meant, whether it was a gesture, or structure of the mass. When I make a commitment to something, I'm not just going to "go through the motions." I need to know what I need to do, but more importantly, why we do it and what is the meaning behind it. I knew I wasn't able to receive communion, but I would join the kids and receiving a blessing from the priest every mass. We would even sit on certain sides of the pews at church, just to make sure we were on the side where the priest would be so that I could get the blessing from him and not from a Eucharistic minister.

In the Fall of 2014, my wife mentioned that the next session for the adult confirmation or RCIA program would start soon. I wanted to continue my sacraments, but I got busy at work, and didn't feel ready. I had a week or less to decide and it felt rushed and I was not prepared mentally. But I made the promise to myself that I would join next year's class. Here I am, attending mass regularly, but NOT receiving communion . . . it didn't seem fair.

This past September, I finally was able to sign up for the adult confirmation class. (I didn't do the RCIA program since I was already baptized as a child.) In learning more and more about my Catholic faith, I know that the Eucharist is one of, if not, THE most important part about being catholic. Getting a blessing every week just wasn't the same as being able to receive the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For two years, I felt left out.

For me, the class has been great, informative in helping me learn about our faith, its teachings, and traditions. But truly the highlight has been finally being able to receive the body and blood of Christ. Although it has only been a week, I now truly feel I am officially a Catholic. I can't explain it, but I do feel there is a great blessing and grace that comes with it. I am now truly rooted in my Catholic faith. Before it was just going through the motions, but now that I've received Jesus Christ, I have to be Christ to others. After that moment, from this point on, I am truly practicing what I'm preaching.

It's not just going to church on Sundays, but living your faith in your everyday life. I thank God the Father for always blessing me and giving me the strength and grace towards my journey to the Eucharist. I'm living each day to humbly serve my God the Father. If He asks me to do something, I will be obedient because I am His humble servant . . . And my journey isn't over yet! I look forward to receiving the Holy Spirit and being "confirmed" in my Catholic faith this coming Easter season.

"Always remember the life you have in this world is your actual offering before God's throne in the everlasting realm." • □

Editor's Note: Gerrard received his 1st Communion on Sunday, December 6, 2015, at the Spiritual Army's 1st Sunday Devotion to God the Father at the Monastery of the Angels, with Fr. Vincent Hughes, OFM, celebrating.



THANK YOU

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

Psalm 106:2

THE 800 OUR FATHER | 2000 HAIL MARY DEVOTIONS

The Spiritual Army of God the Father acknowledges with thanks our generous December sponsors of the 800 Our Father and 2000 Hail Mary Devotions. We are grateful that we have merited their partnership and support in providing a venue of spirituality and fellowship for the devotees of God the Father.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Los Angeles, California

2000 Hail Mary Devotion

The 800 Our Father Devotion

Gary and Maria Sheets

Marilyn Batino | Carmen Mora
Alice Ng | Carolina Pineda
Glecy Rosario | Kevin Zhu

FOR PRAYERS HEARD AND PETITIONS GRANTED

HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN OUR CRY FOR MERCY RECEIVES ITS LOVING ANSWER FROM OUR MASTER?

WE NEED TO PRAISE AND THANK JESUS FOR HIS HEALING POWER, MERCY, AND GRACE.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU FELL FACE DOWN AND PRAISED JESUS?

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU PRAISED AND THANKED THE LORD

FOR ALL THAT HE HAS DONE FOR YOU

WITH A GENUINE HEART AND A PROSTRATE POSTURE?

We praise and give thanks to God Almighty for healing the lesion on my lip. My dermatologist ordered a biopsy but the result did not offer much help in identifying the nature and cause of the "cold sore". The Lord, through His Helper, laid a hand on my lip and, lo and behold, my lip started to heal.

We are also thankful to the Lord for blessing our daughter and her family with a new home they could call their own. Thank you Lord!

. – Frank & Beth Lim

Thank you Father for your loving presence in my life – it's been 25 years now – and counting!

- April K.

Thank you God the Father for the opportunity to finish the ceiling of your Church in our hometown. Thank you for your generous provisions through the hearts of those people you have touched. Thank you for our safe travels and the occasions to visit those who are dear and near to us.

May you continue to strengthen our faith and bless us with a sincere desire to make You known, honored and loved by all Men!

- Frank & Lorma Batino

- Florita Gajito

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
12:30 P.M. - Rosary to the Father | 1:15 P.M. - Holy Mass
2:00 P.M. - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

The 800 Our Father Devotion – December 19, 2015

at the Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | starting at 8:30 a.m.

Please call Victor at (213) 385-7798 if you wish to become a Sponsor of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion.

IN CHINO HILLS:

Sacred Heard Devotional Group for Departed Souls

Every 1st Friday of the Month | 16657 Tourmaline Street | Chino Hills, CA 91709
Devotional Prayers start at 8:30 P.M.

IN LAS VEGAS:

Sacred Heart and Precious Blood of Jesus Devotion for Departed Souls

Every 1st Friday of the Month
at The Cenacle House in The Enclave 8455 W. Sahara Avenue #172 | Las Vegas, NV 89117
Devotional Prayers start at 2:30 P.M.

1st Saturday Devotion

at Saint Frances de Sales Parish | 1111 Michael Way | Las Vegas, NV 80108 at 8:00 AM
Devotional Prayers follow.

and

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave | 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, | Las Vegas, NV 89117 at 1:00 PM
Cenacle will be at 10:00 AM before the devotional prayers.

Please call Evelyn at (702)274-4315 for entry to The Enclave or for more information.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the month from 2:00 to 3:30 P.M.
at The Cenacle House in The Enclave | 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, | Las Vegas, NV 89117

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – December 12, 2015

*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.*

Mother of Perpetual Help Novena & Rosary Prayers

Every 1st Wednesday of the month after the 7:30 AM Mass
St. Francis de Sales Parish | 1111 Michael Way | Las Vegas, NV 89108

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 call her U.S. Vonage phone (510) 779-6652, text her at Manila #916-384-9300, and/or call her Manila landline 939-4677. Mention Mila Lumba's name to be recognized.