

# God Loves You – Truly!

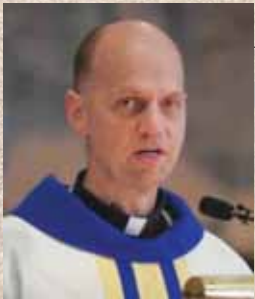


**Father Jim Chern**

Fr. Jim Chern has been a priest in the Archdiocese of Newark since 1999. He graduated with his master's in theology from Seton Hall University. After his graduation he was assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes parish where he served as Parochial Vicar for 7 years.

In 2007 he was named director of the Newman Catholic Center at Montclair State University where he still serves. In 2018 Fr. Jim was additionally named Archdiocesan Director of Campus Ministry by Cardinal Joseph Tobin.

Homily website: <https://homilyonthespot.com>



**Father Jim Ferry**

Fr. Jim Ferry has been a priest in the Archdiocese of Newark since 2006. He graduated with a master's in divinity from Seton Hall University. After his graduation he was assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes parish where he served as Parochial Vicar for 3 years.

In 2009-2014, he was the Catholic Chaplain and Campus Minister at Fairleigh Dickinson University and chaplain to the Men's Basketball team.

In 2014, Fr. Jim Ferry became Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Homily website: <https://ferryjam.blogspot.com>

If we

*live* by the Spirit

let us also

*walk* by the Spirit

**Galatians 5:25**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Church † Established 1914**

[lourdeswestorange.org](http://lourdeswestorange.org)

**Grotto,  
Our Lady of Lourdes, West Orange**



View from the school, a snow day!



View from soccer net at BBQ picnic in June

*Join us as we pray the Rosary at the Grotto  
every night outside  
during the month of October at 6:30 pm.  
All are welcome!*

**GOSPEL HOMILIES  
from  
Our Lady of Lourdes Church**

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*A gift to our 2024 Confirmation Candidates  
and  
2024-2025 Religious Education Young People  
and Families*

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Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church

**1914 † 2024 † ALWAYS**

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***Letter to the 2024 Confirmation Candidates***

Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
August 15, 2024

*Dear Friend,*

*You are now and always will be a part of our family, having been given the Sacrament of Confirmation and anointing in the Holy Spirit at Our Lady of Lourdes Church.*

*Our Religious Education teachers, volunteers, and parishioners promise to pray for you as you make your Profession of Faith and live out this vow in your life. We also pray for and express our gratitude to your parents and families through whom you first learned of God's love.*

*We read in the 119th Psalm that God's word is a light for our path. Through your Baptism – and now, Confirmation – this word is also written in your heart.*

*As the Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes, my calling is to assist you not only by testifying and speaking, but also by praying and listening. I encourage you also to take time for prayer every day so that your steps might be illuminated. I encourage you to take time to review your life and examine your conscience – every night – so that you will recognize how the Holy Spirit is working in your life, not only at times of strength, but also at moments of weakness.*

*This year, 2024, is the first edition of this pamphlet and also marks the 110th Anniversary of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Please know that you are following in the footsteps of holy women and men – girls and boys – of many generations. We are also one with them in the Communion of Saints and Angels.*

*Congratulations to you on this anointing in the Holy Spirit. I pray that these Sunday homilies may inspire you and remind you of the importance of being refreshed and mindful of God's love each and every Sunday Mass. We need you!*

*This work, while featuring the homilies of Father Jim Chern and myself, reflects the collaboration of several volunteers by whom you and our young people are taught. I am deeply grateful for the witness of all of our parishioners by whom I am reminded to seek God's word to light my own path and to keep the light of His Church burning brightly in us all.*

*In Christ's Peace,*

*Father Jim Ferry, Pastor*

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Book of Exodus, Chapter 20

1.

I, the Lord, am thy God. Thou shalt not have any other gods besides me.

2.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.

3.

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

4.

Honor thy father and thy mother.

5.

Thou shalt not kill.

6.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

7.

Thou shalt not steal.

8.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

9.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

10.

Thou shalt not covet anything that belongs to thy neighbor.

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# INTRODUCTION

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The first four sermons in this pamphlet seek to bring us into a stronger faith relationship with God and to help us appreciate His blessings. The first homily entitled “When God Speaks” shows us that God finds us where we are and asks us to be attentive to Him and to others whom He sends our way. If we are not looking for God, we may miss those grace-filled moments and opportunities that God generously offers to us. The second homily entitled “The Meaning of Suffering” shows us the power of being a child of God. The third homily, “Every 3 Years,” reminds us how much Jesus loves and trusts us in spite of our weaknesses, sinful nature and self-doubts. The fourth homily asks “Are You Blessed?” and attempts to show us just how blessed by God we really are.

The remaining homilies provide wonderful insights into the practical aspects of our Catholic faith. The homily “His Burden is Light” helps us understand what the Good Shepherd expects of us as his chosen faithful. Hint: His yoke is easy!! The homily of EWTN’s Chaplain Fr. Joseph Mary shows us the nature of God’s covenants of love with us and how He can be intimately with us always till the end of time. The seventh homily, “On Receiving Communion,” centers on the summit of our faith – the Mass. And the final homily entitled “Mass Not Ended” explains the need to return Jesus’ love each day with and through our own lives. In short, these select homilies will help all who take the time to read and embrace their wisdom to become better Christians, and we hope “good and faithful servants.”

## CHURCH HISTORY AND OUR LADY OF LOURDES

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The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes is February 11, a feast day that reflects our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The origins of this devotion trace back to the grotto of Lourdes vividly depicted in the mosaic over our altar. In the image, Bernadette is seen on the right, praying with her rosary, while the Blessed Virgin Mary is on the left.

On February 11, 1858, Bernadette, a young girl from a poor family, went out to collect firewood in the cold winter of southwestern France. Her family, struggling with debt, lived in dire conditions. While gathering firewood, Bernadette experienced a vision. She described seeing a “*petito damizelo*,” which translates to a “petite damsel” or “beautiful lady.” However, her account was met with disbelief. As a young, uneducated peasant, Bernadette lacked credibility, and neither her family nor the local priests believed her. Despite this, Bernadette remained steadfast in her claim.

To test her, the priests instructed Bernadette to ask the lady’s identity and name. When Bernadette inquired, the lady revealed, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” This response created further challenges for Bernadette, as no one had ever referred to Mary in this manner. At that time, people might have said, “Mary was immaculately conceived,” or referred to her as “Immaculate Mary,” but the phrase “Mary is the Immaculate Conception” was unfamiliar and even awkward, particularly in 19th-century France. Bernadette’s insistence on these exact words eventually led people to believe her, as they realized she could not have known such a term without divine revelation. Bernadette, who barely knew her catechism and could only make the sign of the cross, would not have understood the concept of the Immaculate Conception on her own.

As word of Bernadette’s visions spread, Lourdes became a destination for pilgrims, and Bernadette herself attracted attention. Yet, she shunned fame and notoriety, remaining a humble disciple. Her life exemplifies how we are called to be the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth,” living with humility, honesty, courage and faith.

Bernadette’s story reminds us of the biblical definition: “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) Bernadette’s faith allowed her to see and express what others could not. Her witness, like ours, matters, even when it is not immediately visible to others. The most beautiful and significant aspects of our faith are often those that cannot be seen or touched, but are deeply felt within the heart.

As we gather to pray at Our Lady of Lourdes, let us be reminded of the importance of our faith and witness. It is beautiful that we are here, building up the Body of Christ in the world. Our prayers and presence matter to God, to our families and to those around us.

*Notre Dame de Lourdes, priez pour nous.*

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

# WHEN GOD SPEAKS

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*Rev. James Chern, 1/14/2024*

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19, Ps. 40:2-10, 1 Cor. 6:13-20, Jn. 1:35-42

One of the unique experiences of being a priest is wearing the Roman Collar out in public. A couple of weeks ago, two priest friends and I happened to be out for breakfast, and some anonymous fellow diners had very generously picked up the check while another patron stopped us as we walked out the door to ask us if we wanted to know why he hated the Catholic Church. Truth be told, not really, but when we wear our clerical clothing out in public, that's part of what is expected – any and anything from the unnecessary kindness to the unexpected animosity – to be a sign of being dedicated to Jesus Christ, His Priesthood, His Church and to be accessible to all the various reactions.

One recent interaction in particular was memorable. I was at an airport waiting to board a plane. A man approached me and asked if I was a Catholic priest, and he just said, "Father, my life is such a mess. Could you give me a blessing?" So many thoughts and reactions immediately went through my mind – you can never be sure how open and ready someone is to share stuff, how much they want to share, but having two hours till my plane took off, I took a chance, put the book I was reading aside and just said: "do you want to sit down, and talk about what's going on?" Within moments, he was spilling his guts about how he was raised Catholic but hadn't been to church in a very long time – even for Christmas this year; he was living with his girlfriend, they had found out she was pregnant, they weren't planning on getting married, they didn't want to be parents, but he knew abortion was, as he said it "didn't feel right." As my mind raced with all that was just laid out there, I couldn't shake his initial request for a blessing. It would have been a lot easier had I just extended my hand, said a spontaneous prayer, and made the sign of the Cross. But the reality was my new friend was looking for more than that, which is why he spontaneously poured out the mess he was experiencing to a complete stranger that, more than likely, unless God's providence intercedes again, he'll never meet again. He saw a priest and was reaching out to God, which is always, always a beautiful, precious,

vulnerable, and sacred thing – whether it's in the midst of an airplane terminal in St. Louis, Missouri, or here in this beautiful Church where we gather for Sunday Mass. While our purpose for coming to Mass is ultimately to offer God the worship He's owed – that's why we respond it is "right and just" that we are here and offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At the same time, God, who is all good and all loving, turns his ear to our reaching out to Him and hears our cries, our concerns, our prayers. But how many of us really want to hear what God has to say to us?

This is an important thing to reflect on. When we're praying, do we believe that God loves and cares for us and desires our ultimate good? That He listens to us? And that He actually speaks to us? Do we really want to hear what He has to say to us?

Today's scriptures give us some incredible examples of reflection. The first reading gives us part of the background to one of the greatest prophets in Israel named, Samuel, whom God will direct to call and anoint Israel's greatest of kings, King David. But this is way before that moment in history. At this point, Samuel was adopted by the priest Eli after being dedicated by his mother to serve the Lord. Samuel is just starting to grow in knowledge and understanding of the ways of the Lord and is keeping night watch with the ark of the covenant in the temple – sleeping near the holiest of holy places on all the earth. When Samuel hears his name being called, he immediately goes and wakes up Eli. Three times! There's something comforting to me that these great men, revered throughout Judeo-Christian history, didn't immediately catch that this was a miraculous moment. That God was audibly speaking to Samuel. Here, Samuel was doing what was right and just, honoring the Lord, serving the Lord, offering his sacrifices, worship, and prayers to the Lord. He nor the priest Eli were prepared or expecting to hear God speaking back to them.

In the Gospel, we see a similar thing. St. Andrew and St. John, who were following John the Baptist at that time, are directed to "Behold the Lamb of God." John is basically pointing them to go to Jesus. As they encounter Jesus, the incarnation of the Word of God, as Jesus turns to them and asks, "What are you looking for?" they are unprepared to answer. God Himself is speaking to them. Asking them a direct question: What are you looking for? And they didn't have an answer.

Jesus, the Word of God, speaks to us today and asks the same question: What are you looking for? And if you're like me, it's similar to the apostles; I'm a bit tongue-tied – where do I even start? Immediately, lists



start flying through my mind. I try to prioritize what is most urgent, most pressing – the troubling things, the crises – the prayer requests that people have entrusted me with. With this question being asked, you sense that this is such a pivotal moment, like the genie from the lamp has been unleashed, ready to grant wishes, which so often colors and distorts our vision of prayer. Because this is not the Jesus magic show where Abracadabra here’s a miracle, and poof, he disappears.

Samuel and the first disciples show us that God desires a relationship with His people. Samuel hears his name a fourth time being uttered by God, which, when you think about it, how much more gentle, intimate, and beautiful a moment of encounter that is – by that one word “Samuel,” God is communicating that Samuel is seen, is known, is loved by the creator of all things, the King of the Universe, the Lord God Almighty. All of Samuel’s worship, his sacrifices, and his prayers have been heard, and now the Lord God is prepared to speak back to Samuel – the only response is for him to listen. The disciples of Jesus – and you and me – are being taught to listen as well.

Hearing Jesus ask “What are you looking for?”, the disciples do not answer but ask another question: “*Uhm*, where are you staying?” They are then invited by Jesus to hear the Word of God and to “come and see,” which they do.

Here and now, in this very time and space – the Lord God calls you by name. You are seen. You are loved. You are precious to Him. Those are undeniable facts that are written on every page of scripture. Those truths are as real and present as bread and wine become the very body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ, which we dare to “take and eat” in the Eucharist. But we have to have the humility of Samuel and the obedience of the disciples who know who is God and who isn’t... to listen to Him... to follow Him.

That’s what I tried to share with that young man in our brief few moments in the airport terminal. The fact that he approached me. The fact that he knew what a mess things were. I didn’t have to explain to him that he had made a lot of poor decisions – that living with his girlfriend and having pre-marital sex was wrong, that contemplating abortion is a terrible thing. He knew those things. He knew his life was a mess. He knew he was distancing himself further and further from God with each of those decisions. This is why I told him that God was using me and this encounter to remind him that he is loved, and that God desires his fullness and has plans for him. A plan for his flourishing where he didn’t

need a blessing but could, in fact, become a blessing. But he needs to start listening to all the ways God was speaking to him already. He had been ignoring them and hoped “the mess” would simply disappear. I told him that you’re one confession away, one absolution away from all that guilt, that shame that you’re carrying to be gone, but that doesn’t mean the consequences of those things are gone. He’s offering you that free, complete, unmerited gift of mercy. But you have to be prepared to listen and receive it – meaning, are you prepared to move out, support your girlfriend, and do everything to ensure your son or daughter is loved and protected? If not by you two, then by couples out there desperately longing for a child of their own. Because I’ll give you a blessing, but not to bless this mess – and bless continued bad decisions and mistakes – but to remind you of who you are – that God knows you by name... He has a divine calling on your life, is blessing you to hear these truths, and is calling you to listen and respond to them.

That’s true for each of us as well. Each of these men in the scriptures was far from perfect – broken men – who had struggles, setbacks, fears. They had sins that needed repenting and temptations that needed to be confronted. Like us, in prayer, they called out to God. What makes them memorable and notable is when He spoke back, they listened... they followed.

What will be our story?

# THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

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**Rev. James Ferry, 6/16/2024**

Ezekiel 17:22-24, Ps. 92, 2 Cor. 5:6-10, Mk. 4:26-34

*“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs,…”* Mk. 4:30-32.

In our readings this Sunday and last Sunday, St. Paul writes to the Church of Corinth and reflects on the apparent contradictions of our lives, writing: “although we know that our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” (2 Cor. 4:16). We all know that we simply don’t get any younger and we can see the physical signs of aging as we grow older: our hair recedes and turns gray and white, our skin wrinkles and sags and we can’t do all the things we used to do easily or as quickly. The experience of aging has led at least one Catholic radio commentator to point out that St. Paul’s reference to “wasting away” refers to getting physically and chronologically older.

But what of aging? Is it all bad? By aging, must we be reminded only of our afflictions or the suffering and pain it brings? Our afflictions, be they a stroke, heart disease, anxiety, dementia, tremors or Parkinson’s disease or confinement to home or a wheelchair, can be challenging even overwhelming at times, but St. Paul reminds us that even though our physical bodies are “wasting away,” our inner self is being purified and “renewed day by day.” St. Paul goes one step further to tell us that even our “momentary light afflictions” can produce for us an “eternal weight of glory.”

How can this be? As Christians, we are called to walk by faith, not just by sight. By faith and our own experience, we know that our afflictions can lead us to some of the most important virtues: humility, charity and hope! A few years ago, my dinner plans with a friend were put on hold when he called to tell me that his heartbeat was irregular and he thought

he needed to go to the hospital instead. Our drive to the restaurant became a trip to the ER. It was clear that his heart health was a priority for him – in fact, his life depended on it – and that he had great hope that an ER visit could alleviate his “momentary affliction.”

Our afflictions, though challenging, remind us to care for ourselves and for those around us who are suffering. Suffering always affects the heart, both spiritually and physically – and it is in these afflictions that we are all afforded opportunities to grow spiritually, even as we may be wasting away physically or watching others do so. Our afflictions, and the feelings of helplessness that sometimes accompany them, can and should be a path that humbles us and leads us to God. In this way, even in our suffering, we have a chance to renew our inner beings and refresh our spiritual lives.

In my pastoral ministry, I have witnessed this phenomenon often as I’ve met with those suffering severe illnesses or from advanced age. Particularly in cases where a person’s life is coming to an end. Those suffering a terminal illness can demonstrate a peacefulness and tranquility born of faith and hope that others who are younger and physically stronger may not have. We may even witness a profound hope on the part of those afflicted for a miracle or for peace and pardon through Jesus in the next life, though we might not see or understand with certainty how things will end.

Today’s Gospel centers on Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed and offers us a beautiful insight into how faith in the unseen and spiritual affects of God’s love and grace help us to be renewed inside in spite of our outside’s wasting away. Biblical scholar John Bergsma suggests that the mustard seed represents Jesus himself, who though obscure at both His birth and His death, made John the Baptist jump for joy in his mother’s womb and then rose to bring life and hope to the world through and in spite of his sufferings. Our small acts of love and faith can also bring hope and life and may even grow into something much larger. Did you smile at someone today? Did you admit you were wrong? Did you forgive someone’s faults or mistakes? These little things add up! This mustard seed is Jesus – God’s Word – living, piercing and active (Hebrews 4:12), and we are called to share it with others.

We can also see ourselves as a mustard seed, God’s own seed, planted among others, striving for a healthy transformation, wholeness and the fulfillment of our growth as we age and mature physically and spiritually. Each of us is a seed growing to fulfillment and flourishing through virtue

and God's grace. Yes, we are all growing and changing, but we are also called to recognize that we are already made good through God's love and design.

Pope St. John Paul II taught us to see our bodies as a gift of God's creation to us. Each of us is a unity of body of soul. We can be strong and embody this unity when we exercise and care for our hearts both physically and spiritually. To many, our bodies express the reality of who we are as persons. We are not just some "bodies," however, but some "ones." To renew ourselves and flourish, we must allow our bodies, heart and soul to work and grow as "one," together in harmony to maturity. I recognize that there are both children and adults who may experience identity crises and dysphoria. However, available medical and surgical treatments for some of these conditions are contrary to God's plans for "change." We are all changing and growing, but we must also recognize as people of faith that each of us has already been made good and whole in God's eyes.

Today's parable is quite informative here. We must accept God's gifts and extend our faith even when we do not understand what afflicts us. We may not get the results or answers we want or expect but by ourselves, we cannot make the seed grow as it should. The emphasis of today's Gospel reading is on the power of the seed itself to grow without human intervention. Jesus said this much about its mysterious growth: "It is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all, the seed would sprout and grow, and he knows not how."

Neither we, nor a mustard seed, can grow without light or life apart from God. For the Lord is our light and our life, He is our salvation. Our heart health, indeed, our physical health, requires us to prepare our hearts for life, including eternal life in Him. For our bodies too are temples of God's love. Our heart doesn't just beat to pump blood, it aches to love and be loved. I pray that this parable and all of God's words, especially during this month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, will remind me, remind you, remind us all to put our faith and trust in God, His loving hands and His Holy Spirit, even in the midst of our own changes and struggles. Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine.

St. Paul tells us this is how it is with the Kingdom of God:

*"For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is*

*transitory, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven." 2 Cor. 4:17-18.*

## EVERY 3 YEARS

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**Rev. James Ferry, 4/7/2024**

Acts 4:32-35, 1 John 5:1-6, John 20:19-31

*“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’” Jn. 20:26-27.*

All of us – in some way shape or form – are success-oriented and goal-oriented. Many in our culture and in our families are driven by success and the will to succeed. Success takes a lot of instruction, preparation and practice but can seem elusive prompting many to ask “how long is long enough to wait for ‘success’?”

In the world of sports, there is a study that shows that sports team owners will only wait 3 years for success, for a winning result. 3 years or 36 months the average tenure or duration of a professional coach. If the team owner’s desired results are not achieved within 3 years, the coach will be shown the door. This 3-year cycle of “firing and hiring” is driven by the insatiable desire for success and championships.

This also brings up an interesting question: if the coach’s job is on the line after 3 years, does this mean that the full responsibility rests on the coach and that the players do not really matter? Are the players just there to “follow the rules” or “do as they are told”? On some level, this question is relevant to us in today’s Easter Gospel.

In John’s Gospel, we see Jesus as the unparalleled leader with his disciples sometimes seen as mere followers, perhaps even foolish ones. Jesus also had a 3 year “plan” a 3 year “term”, at the end of which there occurred His rejection by the Jewish leaders, and the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Savior. We see disciples who faltered, even betraying and deserting Jesus in his hour of need. Judas, Peter, and the others—all seemed to fail when tested, leaving Jesus seemingly defeated after 3 years

of leadership. Time for a change? It’s as if the disciples were poised to seek a new teacher, a fresh direction, another team to play for. Should they seek success elsewhere?

Despite the Lord’s instruction and preparation, the disciples were fearful and remained uncertain of their own success, their own fate. Judas had already changed teams and Thomas had real doubts. But, in the Gospel today, we read that Jesus appeared to them and stood in their midst. He does not blow a whistle or shout orders but simply says, “Peace be with you.” That response might seem strange but Jesus knew what was in their minds and hearts. More importantly, our Savior was offering them a model of benevolent leadership, not just to make his followers “feel good,” but to transfer and delegate to them primary responsibility for the ministry of the forgiveness of sins in sacramental confession: “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jn. 20:21.

It is quite a statement of hope and promise that Jesus should entrust the forgiveness of sins to his disciples by whom he had been disbelieved and abandoned. As teacher and leader, Jesus could have been justifiably disappointed in his “players” but does not berate them or chew them out for having denied Him and taking the escape parachute out of Jerusalem. Rather, He extends His mercy to Thomas and Peter, allows their redemption and offers them the gift of the Holy Spirit as He invites them once again to follow Him. Jesus’ plan is not just a 3-year plan but a plan for their holiness and eternal salvation – and for ours.

Whether we believe or not, we might still think that Jesus should not trust us. Jesus shows that he is willing to trust you and me and says so in clear terms: “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Matthew 9:12-13.

Jesus is ready and willing to trust each one of us because He chose us. Jn. 15:16. He came not to you and me in our righteousness but in our sinfulness. Jesus proved His love for us because He gave His life for us while we were still sinners. Rom. 5:8. So, Jesus comes to call sinners – that includes you and me – to grow in holiness, to bear fruit and to spread the word about God’s merciful love for us.

What then should we expect when things go wrong, when we sin due to our own human weakness or outright willful action, when things do not go according to plan? Yes, we will make mistakes, things will go wrong and we will fall short at times. Will we be fired?

Here is a brief example of the “weakness” case and what I might have expected. Several years ago, my mother was preparing for back surgery to correct a painful condition and vertebrae and improve her walking. There were preparatory steps leading to the surgery. My brother, father and I had to make sure certain things were done medically to prepare her. There was one particular detail that I would have preferred the hospital to administer, but it was left to us. However, I did the opposite of what I was supposed to do. Afterwards, my mother was fine, but I realized that in my hastiness and weakness, I had not done what was necessary. I even joked that my mother would be suing us for malpractice. That would be justice, right!

Of course, my mother did not hire a lawyer to go against her family for malpractice, but I think she had a case! My mother recognized us as one of her own.

Didn't Jesus too have a case against his disciples? They did not follow his plan, yet Jesus returned to his disciples saying “Peace be with you.” Why? The simple, beautiful and reassuring response is that He recognizes the disciples as His own.

Today, Jesus is investing himself even more fully in his followers, in you and me, by giving himself to us totally in his Body and Blood. From the Resurrection and Ascension onward, Jesus is making himself equally available to every one of us in the Body and Blood of the Eucharist. He is showing the disciples that they are forgiven so that they can forgive others, share in His redemptive mission and attain heaven for all eternity.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? On one level, the obvious implication of following Jesus is both to “get in line” and give up one's previous occupation. Peter, James, John were fishermen. Matthew was a tax collector. They change professions, work, job description.

Being a follower of Jesus may mean such an outward change, but more importantly, for all of us it means an interior change of heart and conversion. This is also the message to Thomas the Apostle in the Gospel today. Thomas is asked: “Have you come to believe because you have seen me?” Jn. 20:29. Would you have believed if you had been there? Would I have believed if I had been there?

I am weak. I would have wanted something in writing! Perhaps, we can praise Thomas for his relentless determination to learn the truth about the Resurrection. This Resurrection reunion is a reminder of why we come to church, why we should confess our sins regularly and how our

Christian faith is meant to inform our lives. In other words, mercy is not something we get, but give.... The Church asks us to experience Jesus' merciful love by going to confession at least once a year and to do so during these 50 days of Easter. Confession is good for the soul!

We need to seek God's mercy, perhaps more often, so that we can grow in love, in charity towards those who trespass against us and to forgive those against whom we feel justified in anger and revenge. The path of wishing harm on others is harmful and toxic. We must recognize and appreciate that Jesus, in His love for us, gives us another “escape route.” We need not wait 3 years – or every 3 years to take it. Jesus commands us to keep His commandments, a burden that is lighter than the burdens we carry as a result of our sins. We are called to seek God's mercy every day. Love and pray for your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” Jn. 13:34.

How long must our Savior wait for you or for me to turn back to Him?

This is the Gospel Good News! Blessed are you when you hear this and when you see this. Blessed are you who have not seen and believed. Our Savior is willing to wait for you.

## ARE YOU BLESSED?

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*Rev. James Chern, 1/28/2023*

Zep. 2:3, 3:12-13, Ps. 146:6-10, 1 Cor. 1:26-31, Mt. 5:1-12a

*“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”*  
Mt. 5:11-12

ARE YOU BLESSED? Just asking that question can trigger a wide variety of responses. A quick google search of some headlines can illustrate what I mean: “Despite devastating loss after tornado, Pasadena neighbors say they’re blessed.” “[Basketball coach] on his 400th win says ‘I’ve been blessed.’” “[Professional athlete] blessed with baby girl.” “Florida derby champ says he is blessed with trio of runners in upcoming horse race.”

The awe and reverence obviously run on a scale of quite different extremes from someone who is thankful they survived a natural disaster as opposed to someone racing horses. But you get the sense people use the term “blessed,” to describe a sense of gratitude for things that are out of a person’s control.

We might have some Catholic guilt kick in that at the question “Are you blessed” instinctively makes us answer “Yes, of course, I am.” We want to answer correctly and know on a particular level that there’s much to be grateful for. Things we take for granted or can forget to acknowledge over time. Yes – we’re blessed we can quickly answer. But I think this Gospel is meant to give us a moment to pause to think about what it really means to be “blessed?” How does Jesus define it?

If you’re like me hearing the Beatitudes, you quickly think of groups of those struggling in the world that Jesus identifies with. That He’s in solidarity with those who are poor, those who mourn, and those who are persecuted. And that’s what makes them blessed, that God has noticed them, that their predicaments are not punishments from God, that He draws near to them in their need. Which is very true. But that can leave

the impression that if you’re not suffering you’re not blessed. Which can lead to all kinds of twisted misunderstandings and awful theology.

Instead, can we hear in this opening sentence to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount an invitation? That Jesus is calling us to be “Blessed?” I’m embarrassed that for most of my life, I never saw this as Jesus giving us a ladder to climb. The interconnectedness of these 8 beatitudes that make us citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven:

– *The poor in spirit* isn’t simply talking about physical poverty – but knowing they didn’t will themselves into being – that this breath that they breathe, this life that they live is a gift from God. They have no claim on God, there’s no entitlement, and they don’t deserve anything. But remarkably, God in His Goodness – He has created them. That He knows them. That He loves them. When they accept that truth, that is what makes them *poor in spirit*. They have nothing to offer.

– *Those who mourn* are those who after they’ve recognized that poverty in spirit mourn the ways and things they’ve used to numb, distract, and fool themselves from that reality. They’re mourning how often they’ve settled for being citizens of this broken world and pursued greatness here rather than living as heavenly citizens.

– *The meek* – humbly acknowledging that anything they have is by God’s grace. They can’t boast of themselves or their greatness recognizing that anything great they achieve ultimately the source is God.

– *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* maintain an awareness of their weaknesses as human beings, that even as they climb this ladder are still tempted by people, things, and broken desires, but choose to remain fixed on this call from Jesus, to reject those things and to keep climbing to not give into those things, but to keep climbing.

– *Those who are merciful*, can empathize with others who are struggling in their faith journeys. They know the temptation, they know the weakness of being a fellow human being, the struggle to make the right choices to follow Jesus – and that makes us merciful.

All of those steps begin to make one *clean of heart*. They start to see the fleeting nature of the things of this world and no longer feel an attachment to them which makes being a *peacemaker* a logical step. They see the absurdity of the fights over the temporal goods, the lusts, and disordered passions that cause so much strife whether among nations or far closer to home.

Ultimately after taking these steps, they find themselves as *those persecuted for the sake of righteousness* – where Jesus makes it clear that following Him, the world is going to hate it – hate you for doing it. Because following the way of God is counter-cultural, swimming upstream. And when you're doing that, it is at first annoying to those who aren't and inevitably an obstacle because you're not cooperating with the goals, and desires, of the powers of the earth.

The more I sat with this and reflected on it, the more eye-opening it was. Jesus isn't simply identifying groups of people who are "blessed" but calling us to desire being blessed ourselves. That it is accessible to every one of us right here where we are. That it is meant for every one of us to use as a point of reflection on whether we are truly blessed in the eyes of Jesus, and whether we are pursuing life as a citizen of Heaven that He lays out. The last few years especially that's been a personal challenge.

I have fears. I know my inadequacies, my faults, and my failures. I can overthink them. Which can lead me to believe lies about myself: I'm not as smart as that priest; I'm not as holy as that nun; I'm not as eloquent or creative as that guy; I'm not as talented or popular or liked as that person... and on and on. None of those thoughts made me a better person and they definitely did not make me a better disciple or priest. Instead, it simply caused distress and anxiety and undermined what God had/is/wants to do. When I can silence that. Stop comparisons with others. Try to be clear that I want to honor the Lord. Follow Him. Serve Him. Love Him... it is then that I start climbing this ladder that Jesus has given us recognizing I'm "poor in spirit."

This makes me embarrassed about all the times I've tried to do things my own way, maniacally focusing on controlling things. Wasting time obsessing in my quest for perfection. Letting my pride and ego get in the way. But that's not meant to simply wallow in. God calls me out of it, which is why I repent of that I *mourn* that – the Lord comforts me by offering me His forgiveness.

When I can internalize those truths about myself and what *God initiates*, what *He is doing* then I can be comfortable in my own skin... which causes me to be *meek* because I realize I don't have to promote myself or diminish others to feel noticed or important or worthy. I can rejoice in being God's beloved son, being called to share in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Which leads to remembering *holiness is not something I possess*. We don't graduate and get a holiness degree. My ordination day was not my being

licensed in holiness. I have to continue to want to be holy. I have to constantly choose to pursue it. I need constant penance. I need to fast. So that I'm always mindful of the need to *hunger and thirst for righteousness*.

And these steps call me to not forget how hard it was and is to follow Jesus in our time. Knowing how I've failed. Knowing how I'm tempted. Knowing how easy it is to fall for the lies of the devil and look for loopholes and justifications for any and everything. I can't help but empathize with those going through the same things – which is why I try to explain to people that when they come to confession, that's a humbling thing for me as a priest – to hear people's journeys, knowing how hard life can be, this world can be, how seemingly easily we can fall into temptation and sin. I can't help but hear and see myself in their struggles, empathize, and understand the need to *be merciful*.

The more I'm mindful of each of these steps, the more things change my perception of everything. I never imagined it would be possible to say I was in the vicinity of *clean of heart* – it always seemed something reserved for people like martyrs or the most innocent of individuals – like children who've become canonized Saints. But recognizing that "clean of heart" isn't just reserved for those Saints. It's more about not obsessing over what is fleeting, especially at the expense of what isn't. I shared not too long ago that when I started to realize some of my former obsessions like in the past being a rabid New York Yankees fan that had a whole assortment of collectibles, gear and magazines and books, and all kinds of stuff. Not that those things are sinful, but when I felt myself more intentional and focused on pursuing Jesus and what really mattered, I couldn't help but feel embarrassed by how much time and space those things had taken up in my life. I remember when the Yankees beat the Phillies in the 2009 World Series, the excitement, the exuberance how fleeting that was... when the next day listening to sports radio and they were talking about who would return to the team, who might leave, whether they could repeat and win again next year. I remember yelling at the radio "stop already – how much time and energy it took to get to this and we're already moving on to next year?" Then I remembered I hadn't played a single game. Athletically I'm a mess so I couldn't if I wanted to. So, what was all this time and energy watching and following every game all season, what did it really mean in the grand scheme of life? That was when it started to stop mattering so much to the point that I can't tell you who's even on the team anymore.

As silly an example as that was/is, I never really realized that when I would see fans from rival teams as "enemies." I used to tell people how I

would go on a ban of all things Boston from Spring Training through the end of the season – no Boston Market, no Boston Cream Pie Donuts, no Sam Adams beer. I wish I could say I was joking. But I would seriously reject those things. Not as a superstition – but that somehow I was punishing Boston by rejecting those things. Now I see how in a small way that attachments to things of this world can make us even “jokingly” treat others as enemies that it actually can make us embrace division and discord rather than being peacemakers who find our only true joy in God.

This brings us to the final point of being persecuted. We live in a culture and society that tries to mock even the suggestion of that for us as Christians. Someone pointed out that Wikipedia has this posting for “Christian persecution complex” which they define as the belief, attitude, or worldview that Christian values and Christians are being oppressed by social groups and governments. They conveniently ignore the fact that throughout the world more Christians are being persecuted and martyred right now simply for trying to go to Mass or a Bible study or even identifying as Christian than at any time in the 2,000-year history of our Church. Right here in the US, in the last 2 years, close to 300 churches have been vandalized through arson, broken stained glass windows, decapitated statues, and satanic graffiti for just sharing our Christian beliefs like saying that life begins at conception and that life should be cherished and protected; that God made humanity male and female – that there are only two genders – that marriage is between a man and a woman... or a whole host of other examples that will quickly get you “canceled” for daring to go against the mainstream narratives.

Jesus gives us this path to holiness. Calling each and every one of us to use the beatitudes as our guide out of the brokenness of our sinful world and experiencing the joy of living as citizens of heaven right now. It’s hard work. It’s something that we will continue to struggle with. But as we engage in that struggle, as we strive at each and every step of that ladder, the Saints who left their witness that it’s possible are praying for us and cheering us on. The Lord is pouring His Holy Spirit that gives us the graces we need to keep persevering. Jesus is there with us each and every step of the way, constantly reminding us that God is Our Father who loves us. He has loved us for all eternity. And wants us for all eternity with Him. And for us to focus on these truths as the only thing that matters. Are we blessed? Yes indeed!

## HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT

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*Rev. James Ferry, 7/9/2023*

Zechariah 9:9-10, Ps. 145, Romans 8:9, 11-13, Mt. 11:25-30

*“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.” Mt. 10:14-15*

In February of this year, a few months ago, just hours after an earthquake on the border of Syria and Turkey, some exceptionally trained rescuers arrived and immediately contributed to the collective team effort to find people buried beneath the rubble of collapsed buildings. Just 1 of these trained rescuers – arriving from the Dominican Republic, Switzerland, the U.S. and elsewhere – was able to do the work of 50 “regular” rescuers. Was it because they had better devices, GPS? This was not the reason. They were German Shepherds, Labradors, and other dogs or K-9’s specially trained for search and rescue to use all their senses – especially smell – to find people in the aftermath of an earthquake.

I learned there is an acronym – SAR = Search and Rescue dogs. There’s always an acronym! At the earthquake in Syria-Turkey, the animals are not delivering “random acts of kindness”, but performing what they have been taught to do and what they enjoy doing.

Of course, there are also spontaneous examples of a particular wild animal on land or sea – lion, dolphin – coming to the rescue of a man, woman or child in distress. This is true. But is it also not remarkable that animals can be trained and rejoice in making rescues over and over again?

One thing that we as a human community have succeeded in doing is getting animals to serve our needs, to teach them to do the right thing and even the right thing to be “easy” with continuous training and practice.

In the Gospel this Sunday, Jesus does not explicitly mention any animals – certainly not German Shepherds or K-9’s – but he does refer to something that animals are known to **work at** and to **wear**. Regarding



this, Jesus said: “take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Matthew 11:29.

What is this struggle that animals “work at”; what is this style that they “wear”?

Jesus is referring to the yoke which is a harness that would be put over an animal. In terms of farming and plowing the field, it allowed the animal to pull the plow – it was, shall we say in our terms, “wearable technology”. And, the animal wearing this yoke, is also “sustaining” and “promoting” life – even its own life – by preparing the ground to be planted for corn, wheat, or other food. Jesus said in the Gospel: “take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Matthew 11:29.

What is this yoke? The yoke equals all of God’s commandments. In the ancient Jewish tradition of the rabbis and the Temple, a devout Jewish man would even “wear” a scroll of biblical verses attached to his forehead. In our own Catholic rituals of being married, the wife and husband are joined to each other – sometimes by a cord at the wedding ceremony – or a veil – and certainly by wearing of rings. This ring is “placed on” husband by his wife, and wife by her husband. So, we still wear symbols to indicate devotion. It is a yoke; it is a burden.

Can this yoke be a challenge, a burden, a problem? God has given us the 10 Commandments, all the commandments for our well-being and good. They are consistent with reason, express man’s fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor and are “engraved by God in the human heart.” CCC 2072.

In the Our Father, there is a command that we would “forgive those who trespass against us”. This is burdensome! Sometimes, it is painful. The British writer, C.S. Lewis, in a book called “The Problem of Pain” wrote that we sometimes have difficulty “reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves.” (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 40) Lewis asserts that we do not come into existence so that we may love God, but so that God may love us. We are created by God’s love and for His love.

As Jesus said, “it is not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” Also, while we describe very young children as “all loving”, this is possible, because the child has received love. Also, love is going to invite us to conversion, to change, even it is painful. Is that a problem? Lewis wrote that he would not care for a friend “who cared only for my happiness and did not object to my becoming dishonest.” (Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, p.42)

So, it is not God’s will to erase or eliminate all pain and suffering. Yet, God makes a path for us, gives us His strength and grace, to help us get through our trials and sufferings. C.S. Lewis uses several biblical examples of how we connect to God. Each “connection” is a different level – each one has “more bars” which suggests both a greater risk in the intimacy but also a greater reward.

**[Level 1] “Possession. Property”.** You and I can live our lives as the “possession” of God, or the property of God. And, living this way, we can learn to do many good things, and be a “service animal”. The problem with this is that unlike the German Shepherd – you and I were not “born and bred” to follow commands. We have free will and are called to learning.

**[Level 2] “Progeny. Offspring”.** It is true that each of us is God’s “daughter” or “son” and we benefit from God’s direction, discipline. As an actual child – under the care of parents – I benefited from my parents’ correction. This was not done as a parental shock and awe – “power” – but to show me the goodness and potential in me. I still need correction!

**[Level 3] “Partnership”.** It is good to be “possessed by God” and to be the “progeny (child) of God”. But, you and I are also called to be the partner of God. This is symbolized in the sacrament of matrimony and marriage.

The ultimate goal is not to be God’s property, not just to be God’s progeny. The ultimate goal is to be God’s partner. And this is expressed in the Sacrament of Matrimony in being married, in the love that exists between husbands and wives. Marriage is a life to which not all of us are called to live with another person, not all of us are married, I’m not married.

But we’re all called to a marital type of commitment to God, EXCLUSIVE. (cf. Exodus 20, 1st Commandment – thou shalt have no idols before me). We are called to exclude idols that hinder us from following God, such as money, comfort and popularity. An idol is something that’s good but could become a “god,” an object of our worship. And we are called to recognize that our relationship with God is based on Jesus laying down His life for us with the church as a spouse. He gives himself up for us. He died for us while we were sinners. And He gives us a model to treat others and to practice forgiveness.

In terms of “heavy burdens”, one of the heaviest to carry around is the burden of revenge or resentment if we have been trespassed against. If we

choose “revenge / vengeance”, we may like it for a while, but it is a heavy burden. It is a “lighter” state – and a weight-loss condition – to forgive someone... but we may have to practice this over and over again. In this state of “marriage of Jesus to the Church” and to you and me, we are called to choose mercy not because it is what we want, but what God wants. Hosea 6:6.

Also, FORGIVENESS does not mean we cannot invite the other person to change, or to conversion. God forgives us not to keep us where we are but to help us to change. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis (p. 98) – I may hope that being a priest in my ministry is in accord with God’s will, but I do not learn this purely being in my feel-good comfort zone. When I go out of my comfort zone, I learn to grow in virtue and goodness. I learn that I am truly free, not doing only what I would choose to make me comfortable.

Jesus is not making us do anything! He’s not just making us his property, not just making us keep up with a state of perpetual childhood. He’s making us his partners. And he told his disciples this at the Last Supper, *“I no longer call you servants for a servant does not know what his master is doing. I call you friends. Because I have told you everything I’ve learned from my father.”* Jesus doesn’t want us just to be his property, or just his progeny. He wants us to be His partner. And His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

## ON RECEIVING COMMUNION

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*Rev. James Chern, 5/21/2022*

Acts 15:1-2, Ps. 67:2-8, Rev. 21:10-14, 22-23, Jn. 14:23-29

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”* Jn. 6:51

With the viral pandemic, shutdowns, and all the insanity that is still hard to believe has occurred over the last two years, on that list of things to get used to has been “live-streaming” Mass. At the Newman Center at Montclair State, in March of 2020 when everything first started, we had this unique experience. First off, there were four FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) missionaries living in apartments at the Newman Center with me so we were, in effect, quarantined together. And given that they were more tech-savvy than I, they explained how we could easily “live-stream” everything with our students from our existing iPhones and iPads. So within days, we were basically doing all of our regular programs, Bible studies, meetings, as well as Mass and Eucharistic Holy Hour, online with our students to try to keep some sense of normalcy for all of them, and truth be told, for ourselves as well. It was helpful in a lot of ways – but obviously far from perfect. The quality wasn’t always the best. There were wi-fi disruptions and technical issues. But when confronted with the otherwise nonstop negative news and orders of what we could not do, *this was something we could do.*

One thing I didn’t expect was getting an “online” audience that was at times in the hundreds and at our peak even thousands of people tuning in. It was hard to believe that we were one of the first to be offering live-stream Masses and that people were finding us, sharing us all over the world.

With much of the craziness of those worst of times behind us, we’ve dropped a lot of our live streaming. For one, our college students are “zoomed out” with all the virtual stuff. And we know that in our weekly events or bible studies, it’s awkward to have some in-person and some

online. In a pinch, if there's an outbreak or something – or now during the summer months when they're all far from campus, we might revert to it just to keep connected. But we try to keep away from doing it. The only thing that we continued to live-stream on a regular basis during the semester was our Sunday Night Mass. Honestly, I've been really conflicted about it. Because I didn't want to continue to encourage people to simply watch online. It's not the same as being here in person. It's not meant to be an acceptable option or alternative to being in person, especially as Catholic Christians. Sacraments are moments where we encounter Jesus Christ real and present among us... "outward signs instituted by Jesus Christ to give grace" as some memorized. Sunday Mass is something as Catholics we're obligated to attend – not log into. But I also knew that there were some who were still incredibly afraid and were very limited in going anywhere or doing anything. And some of our students actually had family members who are homebound and enjoyed the live streams, so I didn't want to be insensitive to those legitimate things, or when some of our students ended up being ordered to quarantine because of exposure or something for them to feel completely disconnected. So we've continued them through this past year.

One regular "online-congregant," said to me they noticed something peculiar about our Sunday Masses. The first was that every week right after I receive the Body and Blood of Christ and before I start distributing communion I make an announcement. I say "For those Catholics who wish to receive the Body of Christ, I invite you to come forward from the front to the rear and return to your seats by the side aisle. For those who aren't Catholic or if you're not prepared to receive communion tonight and would like to receive a blessing, please feel free to come forward, and just cross your arms over your chest and I will be happy to give you a blessing." There are a couple of reasons I do that. It's not uncommon for us to have random students just see Mass going on in the Student Center in the Cafeteria and wander in to see what's going on... or sometimes different religion or sociology professors will assign non-Catholics to attend a service to experience something they've never done in their lives and write about it... or one of our students invites their friends and roommates to come with them (which makes me most happy, as that's Evangelization 101... would that every one of us did that on a regular basis).

The other reason I make the announcement is meant to be a reminder that going to Mass on Sunday is an obligation. Receiving the Eucharist is a precious gift, something that is extremely serious and that we need to take seriously. And we work really hard with our students to very gently

catechize them on that point. Some didn't know for example that they're supposed to "fast" for an hour before going to Mass. Some didn't know that missing Sunday Mass was a Mortal Sin and that they need to go to confession before they receive communion. Some didn't even know what a mortal sin was and hadn't been to confession since their first confession.

So this particular "online congregant" watching our Sunday Mass livestream who asked me about this said that they were surprised to see how many kids coming forward to receive a blessing. And noted that she had never really seen that at her local parish. I agreed with her.

We're living in very strange times. People are stressed, on the edge, and angry about a lot of things. Even in the Church. One of the horrific impacts of the sex abuse scandals in the Church has been Church leaders not doing the right thing. They didn't deal with the reports of the abuse in the right way. They didn't treat victims the right way. They didn't treat those alleged of abusing others the right way.

But it also crippled the Church from speaking our truths about our faith in clarity and charity. Where we were perhaps over-compensating and grateful people were simply coming to Mass rather than talking about the seriousness of what it is we do in this Sacred place. The call to holiness that every one of us is responsible to respond to. This is why when Archbishop Cordileone, the Archbishop of San Francisco issued a statement on Friday about House Speaker Nancy Pelosi being barred from receiving the Eucharist it became international news. In these very politically divisive times for some sadly, this simply became another story on the rundown of talking points that was either a cause for celebration (one saying this was another "great day" for "our side") to others saying all kinds of vile things about the Church and its leaders – or pointing to other Catholic clerics or personalities to hear what they wanted to hear (*this was wrong, if Nancy Pelosi came to me I'd give her communion, etc.*)

For the Archbishop to have come to this point to make such a public declaration is probably the last thing he wanted to do. He had written a public letter talking about the importance of life, and the grave evil that abortion is, which has been consistent in Church teaching for thousands of years. He had tried to reach out privately to the politician to privately speak to her about her very public stands where she has vowed to expand laws allowing abortion up till the day of birth and even in some instances after birth, which is more accurately called infanticide. He especially was

concerned where she would propose these things and then invoke her Catholic faith and distort Church teaching to justify these positions.

All of this is awful. But these are strange and serious times. And even though this is the last thing I wanted to talk about or bring up in a homily, (believe me, I had another one written and ready to go in case I chickened out) People have been misled and manipulated for so long. And I know just mentioning the word abortion is triggering for people. I know people personally who've suffered from abortion – I have students, and friends – who I love and care for deeply. I know I don't know the totality of their stories and situations and circumstances. But I know they are suffering and in pain, some are lost and trying to find healing. And the last thing I want anyone who's suffered from that to think that they are unwelcome here or judged in any way. God sees the heart and wants to bring His love and healing to this world, especially those who feel most lost and alone and afraid. I believe that with every fiber of my being. And I have friends who spend a lot of their lives of ministry helping women and men who've been hurt by abortion to find how Jesus can bring forgiveness and healing even into these spaces they think are unforgivable. Unforgivable is a lie the devil has been masterful at convincing many people to believe. Jesus' love and mercy are abundant and generous and available.

But just as deeply, I recognize how important it is for us to reflect on what we do here... what receiving the Eucharist means... what Jesus means when he says in tonight's Gospel: *"whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."* Love isn't just a warm, fuzzy feeling. Love isn't just doing nice things. Love to Jesus is defined as His laying down His life for us on the Cross. It calls us to selflessness and sacrifice. His call to Love invokes the importance of obedience to His word – to His commandments – which is often in conflict with the world, which is demanding and difficult.

This is why this recent news isn't something that anyone should be celebrating or ridiculing. But rather a call for deeper prayer and reflection for all of us. Do we actually believe that the host we receive is Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity? Do we recognize the sacredness of this gift? Do we see His love and humility that He comes to us in such accessible ways because He means what He says in today's Gospel that He wants to come to us and make a dwelling with us? If we do, do we recognize the need on our part to prepare to receive Him? To learn why He teaches what He

teaches through our Church? To humble ourselves and repent for our sins, go to confession?

These are difficult, strange, and serious times. It's why even in the midst of this season of Easter joy, the Lenten practices of "Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving" are not meant to be simply "Lenten" things, but *all-the-time* things. May each of us commit to those practices – for ourselves, for one another, for politicians and Church leaders who are entrusted with so much responsibility and are held to greater standards with those positions of service.

## GOD WANTS A COVENANT WITH YOU

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*Fr. Joseph Mary Wolfe, M.F.V.A., 3/12/2022*

Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Ps. 119:1-8, Mt. 5:43-48

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***“Be perfect just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”***  
Mt. 5:48

The Lord God, Almighty God wants a covenant with you, with you. God wants a covenant with you. And not a covenant that has an expiration date. Not a covenant like marriage that is until death. God wants a covenant with you that is an eternal covenant, forever, lasts forever.

And we can see this throughout the history of salvation. That He makes a covenant with a couple, our first parents in the garden of Eden. He makes a covenant with a family, in Noah. He makes a covenant with a tribe, in Abraham. He makes a covenant with a people we heard in today’s first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, the law was given and now they were to observe this. So, he makes a covenant with a people made up of twelve tribes in Moses. He makes a covenant with a kingdom in David. But the definitive covenant, the eternal covenant, the new and eternal covenant, He would make that in His own son Jesus, who became man for us. And this covenant was not just for a particular people for a particular age or time. But this covenant was for all people, for all time, all humanity, forever – the definitive covenant in His Son Jesus Christ. God wants a covenant with you, with YOU. The Lord God wants a covenant with you!

And a covenant is not just a contract where both parties agree to certain conditions. A covenant is the gift of oneself to the other and of that one giving themselves to you. We know this in marriage, there’s this beautiful covenant of a man to a woman, a woman to the man in this lifelong, till-death-do-us-part covenant. And the Lord himself looked at that as a

way to illustrate an even greater covenant that He wants to have. Jesus described Himself as a bridegroom. How can the wedding guest fast when the bridegroom is with them? We have the beautiful Dominican Sisters here today and they remind us that we are part of the Church, the bride, the brides of Christ. And that we’re members of his bride the Church. He wants a covenant with you. That we are to be a people peculiarly, uniquely His own as a Church, but as individuals too. And we are called as unique individuals into this covenant with the Lord. And that’s really what the Mass is. We are renewing our covenant with the Lord. And so, we’re listening to His words every Mass. We’re listening to His teachings. We heard in today’s Psalm 119 “Blessed are they who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who observe His decrees, who seek Him with all their heart.” And then there’s like a plea here by the Psalmist: “Oh that I might be firm in the ways of keeping your statutes.” Lord give me that grace to be able to observe your statutes, to be faithful to this covenant that you have made.

So, every Mass we are listening to His Word and we’re listening to these Old Testament prefigurements. And then we stand more attentively to listen to the words of the Lord Himself to us, and what He’s teaching us, and we say “Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ” in our response to hearing the Gospel. So we listen to His words.

Then we have an element of the Mass, the offertory. We are offering ourselves. Many times gifts are symbolically brought up to symbolize that offering that we give of ourselves. Again, a covenant is not just a contract with conditions, it’s a gift of myself. But it’s a receiving of the other, so at the offertory we are giving ourselves. What is *re*-presented on the altar is Christ’s perfect, total offering for us. We are offering ourselves to Him in this covenant. We are renewing it with Him each day that we attend Mass. He is renewing it with us. So that is re-presented, that very offering that He made once and for all on Calvary is made present to us. How can we come into contact with what Christ accomplished? It is through the Mass that it’s made present to us, real to us, effective to us. So there is in the Mass, there is this union that takes place, we giving of ourselves to him, He giving Himself to us. In fact, we call it a communion, “com” meaning with union, a union with, a union with Him, in our holy communion.

Even those who are with us through the media, you are not able to receive holy communion but you can make a spiritual communion. And I like something that St. Catherine of Siena said in regard to spiritual communion. She said “it’s like silver.” Receiving the Lord is like gold, but spiritual communion is like silver. Not bad, it’s good. And it’s a real thing,

it's a real communion with Him in a spiritual way. But of course to be preferred, when we are able to, is to receive holy communion itself, to be united with Him in this way in which we have given ourselves to Him and He gives Himself to us.

Now Moses is telling the people, the twelve tribes, they are to observe these things. But Our Lord is calling us higher, as He always does. He's calling us higher. You've heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. I'm going to call you higher, to a higher love, to the perfection of love: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. And for them, they could be thinking immediately of the Romans who were there, who were oppressing them. And the Lord is saying love them, pray for them. Pretty hard thing, pretty hard thing for us to do.

And He brings home too, the reality of our relationship with God, because twice we heard these words from Our Lord's lips – "your heavenly Father." Your Heavenly Father. Pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of *your Heavenly Father*. Be perfect just as *your Heavenly Father* is perfect. So again, it is this relational term that He's using – Father – that we're called, we're invited into this beautiful covenant in which, yes, we do give ourselves to Him, but even more so, we receive from Him.

We have a beautiful quote from St. Therese in today's Magnificat. Therese realizes you know well I can't really do this – love my enemy, pray for my persecutor just on my own. So she puts it into perspective but also with a great message of confidence for us. So Terese says, "I know you don't command the impossible. You know very well that never would I be able to love others as you love them unless you, O My Jesus, love them in me. Your will is to love in me all those you command me to love." Possible to love my enemy and pray for my persecutor. But I know Lord I can do it. You see, that's what's happening in the Mass in this renewal of our covenant, this eternal covenant, that the Lord has made with us and that we are renewing with Him at every Mass. That we're being changed so that our hearts are able to observe these things, that we can come to a higher level of love. We're always being called higher which means we're not there yet. We need to be brought there, we need to look to that. We need the Lord to bring us there.

But we look with confidence to Him to raise us to a higher level of love. And that's what we see in the lives of the saints, isn't it? That they loved in dramatic ways. They prayed for those that were going to execute them like Blessed Miguel Pro, like soon to be St. Titus Brandsma. And the

saints, Maria Goretti and others, they came to this remarkable level of love where they could even love those that put them to death, they could pray for them. That's pretty amazing! That's where the Lord wants to bring all of us.

And we see that in Our Lord's own heart, right that "He would love them to the end," John would write. There was nothing that would hinder His love for us. "Father forgive them." "This day you will be with me in paradise." "Behold your Mother." "I thirst." That's His thirst for us. So again, that is this renewal of this eternal covenant that God has made now in His Son for all people, for all time, forever. God wants a covenant with you, with YOU as a member of His bride, the Church. And that covenant begins with our baptism. If you've never been baptized, seek the Lord. Seek to receive that gift. If you've been away from the Mass, come back. Renew that covenant with the Lord. He wants that with you. He's offering Himself to you. His offering is made present in the Mass and He wants you there so that He can offer Himself once again to you and you to Him, and you can renew that eternal covenant that will last into heaven, into glory.

I conclude again with the words of St. Terese:

*"I know you don't command the impossible. You know very well that never would I be able to love others as you love them unless you, O My Jesus, love them in me. Your will is to love in me all those you command me to love."*

That's what this renewal of our covenant today in the Mass brings about more and more within us. In this holy communion, in this renewal of this new and eternal covenant, we are made more and more like Him, our hearts more and more like His, so that we can live that life of perfection, that life of love that lasts into eternity.

## IMMACULATE MARY AND HOPE OF SALVATION

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*Fr. James Ferry, 12/8/2021*

Genesis 3:9-15, 20, Ps. 98:1-4, Eph. 1:3-6, 11-12, Lk. 1:26-38

*“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.’” Lk. 1:30-33*

Many years ago, I went to a restaurant at which a musical band was performing “live” for the people eating and drinking in the restaurant and recording all of their songs, their entire, live performance. As you might expect, the sound people had set up the room in such a way as to capture the sound, but also to preserve the room in advance from any “faults” or “flaws.” The people making the recording did not want any clamor of glasses knocking together or forks falling on the floor to negatively impact the recording. They did not tell us to turn off or silence our mobile phones, because this was so long ago, none of us had cell phones! But, if we did, we would have been told to silence or turn off our devices. The recording engineer wanted to create an ideal “recording studio” like environment, even though they were not in a recording studio. They wanted an environment of purity, integrity, harmony in the “natural world”.

Is that even possible? For them, it was worth trying for.

I use this musical recording example to suggest what the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception means and what it does **not** mean. Mary is a human person, just as you and I are. For Jesus himself to be born in a state of purity, integrity and harmony with both God and all of humanity,

it was necessary that God should create – in advance – Mary with a soul free from original sin, without the fault or flaw of original sin.

So, the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary being conceived by the grace of God without original sin. What it does not mean is that Mary, as our Blessed Mother, is regarded as some type of goddess or is, any way, not a natural human person. Some people think that the Immaculate Conception refers to Christ’s conception in Mary’s womb without the intervention of a human father; but that is the Virgin Birth, not the Immaculate Conception. Others may think that the Immaculate Conception means Mary was conceived “by the power of the Holy Spirit,” in the way Jesus was, but that, too, is incorrect. Mary was not conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary was conceived naturally by a mother and father who loved and cared for her.

The essence of original sin consists in the deprivation of sanctifying grace, and original sin causes corruption. Mary was preserved from these defects by God’s grace; from the first instant of her existence she was in the state of sanctifying grace and was free from the corrupt nature original sin brings. And, since Jesus would be conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus also was kept free from original sin. Put simply, God foresaw the need to create a new place, a new tabernacle, a new ark for His word. Mary is that new tabernacle, that new ark. Jesus is this word.

Just as the sound engineers wanted to create a pure and harmonious environment for their music – yet in a restaurant where there would naturally be distractions and other noises – the Lord God wanted to create a pure and harmonious environment for Jesus to come into the world, where He could grow and take on our human nature while also having a divine nature. Jesus is one person with a divine nature and human nature.

We honor Mary the mother of God on this feast day.

Recently, I heard a priest on the Catholic radio station (Father Richard Simon) explain it this way – that the Immaculate Conception is given to us so that we might understand the purpose of the Church as our mother and as the source of eternal life and grace.

Right now – and throughout history – when we look around at the church, at members of the church – at the clergy, at priests – at me – we may see people we deem to be unholy and not very good witnesses of

Christ and his love. We may judge ourselves to be not very good witnesses.

And, so, if there are all these not very good witnesses, how can we say that there is a “holy Catholic Church”? We can say and profess and believe there is a holy Catholic Church because the Church was conceived – originally – with exactly 1 member and she was free from sin. Mary of Nazareth was the first parishioner, first parish council member, first finance council member, first lector who read the word of God, and first minister of the Eucharist who beheld the Blessed Sacrament.

Mary does not equal the Church *per se*, but it is Mary’s holiness – provided for in advance and her YES – Mary’s YES to God (“*let it be done to me according to your word*”) that allows the Church to come about through the Birth of Christ.

And, as soon as Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was the Savior to be protected, guarded.

The Immaculate Conception doctrine reminds that the Church began – in holiness – with exactly one member. It continues in holiness through its holiness given by God and also by the striving and choices we are still trying to make.

Mary, too, required a Savior. Like all other descendants of Adam, she was subject to the necessity of contracting original sin. But by a special intervention of God, undertaken at the instant she was conceived, she was preserved from the stain of original sin and its consequences. She was, therefore, redeemed by the grace of Christ, but in a special way—by anticipation.

Consider another analogy: Suppose a man falls into a deep pit, and someone reaches down to pull him out. The man has been “saved” from the pit. Now imagine a woman walking along, and she too is about to topple into the pit, but at the very moment that she is to fall in, someone holds her back and prevents her. She too has been saved from the pit, but in an even better way: She was not simply taken out of the pit, she was prevented from getting stained by the mud in the first place. This is the illustration Christians have used for a thousand years to explain how Mary was saved by Christ. By receiving Christ’s grace at her conception, she had His grace applied to her before she was able to become mired in original sin and its stain.

([www.catholic.com/tract/immaculate-conception-and-assumption](http://www.catholic.com/tract/immaculate-conception-and-assumption))

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that she was “redeemed in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son” (CCC 492). She has more reason to call God her Savior than we do, because He saved her in an even more glorious manner! To use this “fall into the pit” example, we might also realize that Mary is saved because Jesus is the one who by God’s plan goes down into the pit and gives up His life for all of us.

The objection is also raised that if Mary were without sin, she would be equal to God. In the beginning, God created Adam, Eve, and the angels without sin, but none were equal to God. Most of the angels never sinned, and all souls in heaven are without sin. Sinning does not make one human.

([www.catholic.com/tract/immaculate-conception-and-assumption](http://www.catholic.com/tract/immaculate-conception-and-assumption))

We also recognize – in this teaching – that Jesus wants to make His presence, His holiness known not just as an ancient “recording” that was made once and is being played back from a studio or broadcast station over and over, but that Jesus’s word is meant to be “played,” to be “lived” and to be “performed” in your life and in my life each day.



## MASS NOT ENDED

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***Rev. James Ferry, 5/7/2023***

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9 and Jn. 14:1-12

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8*

What does it mean to walk rightly and humbly with God in our lives?

This Sunday, we celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for 2 of our young adults. They will renew their baptismal promises. In the sacrament of baptism, they – and nearly all of us were infants and carried to church and someone else made those baptismal promises for us. Those were our parents, godfathers and godmothers. And now, these faithful young adults have chosen to make their promises affirmatively and publicly themselves. And in many cases, young people, young adults are making those promises before the Bishop and will voluntarily affirm their willingness to follow Jesus and walk and talk what the Church teaches.

We read in John’s Gospel today, Jesus’ direction that “I am the way, the truth and the life”. We could also translate “way” not just as an abstract method, but as a concrete path. Jesus is both our Savior and our Street, He is our Redeemer and Road. He is the Christ and the “Camino,” our Way to salvation and happiness in this life and in the next.

But, do the apostles get this? Do you and I get this?

Jesus sounds a bit frustrated with Philip’s sense of (spiritual) navigation and direction when Philip pleaded to see “God the Father”, Jesus responded:

*“Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me. Philip?”*

What is the “long time” duration to which Jesus refers? This is the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John and in this conversation, Jesus is still “alive and well”. It is a conversation at the Last Supper and Jesus is telling them that He is going away. And, they want directions, GPS, latitude and longitude, etc., in order to follow him. They want specifics!

What is the direction, the road, the destination to Jesus our Lord and Savior? Is he in churches and cathedrals and chapels built by bulldozers and cranes and bricklayers and electricians? Yes, Jesus is present in these places, and we have an obligation to connect with him at Sunday Mass, at church in these locations. But he is not limited to these locations. Jesus tells the disciples to remember “I am with you always.”

In our reading from the first letter of Peter today, we are invited to be “living stones ... being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). This is a reminder that your own home, your apartment, your room is a place of sacrifice and prayer. Peter reminds us that we have a church that is beyond this building. The home is meant to be a little church. Is not your home also “alive” because of the sacrifices you made for your home, for your children? It is true that you do not have a marble altar in your home, but your dinner table, your kitchen counter is also a place where you offer sacrifices. You may not have a microphone and pulpit of stone in your home, but the home is also a place where parents – especially – are called to preach and teach their children. The home is also a place of confession, of mercy and forgiveness; how the children first learn about going to confession by admitting their sins to their parents. In a sense, parents hear the confessions of their children, as your parents and my parents heard our confessions as well and taught us about the confidentiality of mercy and of God’s love.

Why do we preach and teach to our children? For the same reason that Jesus preaches to his own sisters and brothers, the disciples, and to you and to me, so that we will grow up and become more mature in all aspects of life, including our spiritual life, which encourages us to stay focused on the virtues and the higher goods of life. (See, e.g., Col. 3:2 “Set your minds on things that are above; Phil. 4:8 “beloved, whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”)

The scriptural verses about “God as Father” do NOT mean that God is a father who is trying to subdue you or keep you in some childish state. God

is the Father who rejoices in your personal growth, your spiritual maturity and your ability to follow him freely. Through the Gospel today, you and I are guided toward doing what is right, but not necessarily what is easy or comfortable. We may well err, sin and expose our faults along the way as we strive to better ourselves and grow in virtue towards perfection. But as we do, we read in Proverbs that God provides us with the wisdom of His way: “He who conceals his sins prospers not, but he who confesses and forsakes them obtains mercy.” Proverbs 28:13-14.

In the Gospel, Philip the Apostle showed some reluctance to get started, perhaps fearing an error. Do you sometimes avoid doing something or doing what is right due to uncertainty, or not having all the blanks “filled in”? Mentally and emotionally, I’m the kind of person who likes to have all my I’s dotted, T’s crossed, and sentences spellchecked before proceeding. But, is this always realistic or even necessary? Isn’t Philip behaving this way, saying to Jesus – just give us a little more information, data, messaging and then I will proceed, or in Gospel terms:

“Show us this God the Father you are talking about”

Isn’t it true that we can sometimes learn a lot by meeting or learning who someone’s father is or mother is? Some years ago, I was with some co-workers and we were talking about the efficiency, dedication and discipline and sometimes the formality of someone in our group. When we found out that his father was a police officer – NYPD – one person said, “well, that explains everything!”

Jesus is telling Philip and you and me that we do not have to wait for some secret profile of God the Father to be revealed. Rather, Jesus says, “the Father and I are one.” John 10:30.

In some sections of the Gospel, Philip is portrayed as the very eager messenger and courier who brings others to Jesus Christ. For example, Philip introduces Nathaniel to Jesus “under the fig tree”. (cf. John 1:46-50). Philip is with Peter and Andrew when a young boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fishes is introduced to Jesus at the multiplication of the loaves. Philip is good at introducing others to Jesus.

Perhaps Philip could have reminded my classmate to go to Mass. When I was 18 years old, I had my first experience of going to church, to Sunday Mass, on my own initiative without my parents taking me or watching over me. I was away from home on a college campus.

There was a Catholic Mass on my campus in Pennsylvania near Lancaster almost every Saturday afternoon. It was “almost” every Saturday afternoon because this was not a Catholic college. We relied on the goodwill of the Catholic priests around there to visit and say Mass. There were also churches off campus where I went once in a while, but the college chapel on campus – that I walked by hundreds of times -- was my usual place.

I saw friends and classmates there. One of my friends always had a lot of homework to do, equations, science, etc. He was pre-med and would go later to medical school. He’s a physician today. He was often so absorbed in his books that he didn’t watch the clock/time. He asked me to come by and remind him about Mass in the afternoon.

This was my 1st experience of someone telling me that my faith or practice of faith had some influence or effect. In other words, where I was going or what I was doing might affect another person.

This is important, but is not Philip – *are not you and I* – also responsible for introducing ourselves to Jesus? For working on our own repentance, receiving of God’s grace and mercy that we can venture out into the world?

And this also relates how we were called to respond when Jesus is calling you and me to be His disciple, to be a wife or husband, to be a mother or father, to be a son or daughter, to be a brother or sister.

It’s not just about rendering service for others and doing good to them. One of my mentors in the seminary pointed this out that one does not choose the religious life or the priesthood simply as a way to find an occupation to do stuff for other people.

Yes, this is what religious life, priesthood and many vocations involve. Marriage and parenthood also involve commitments to do things for others.

But, we are “called” not to find just an ideal profession or career. Discovering our need for grace, mercy to survive – amid sins and faults – signify that we are “really getting somewhere” on Jesus’ Road, not that we are falling behind.

This is also about saving my own soul. Remember that I also have to listen to Jesus, the Good Shepherd whom we heard about last week.

Life is a continuous journey and one that includes not just being in church, but also what I am going to do each day outside of church. To recognize that, to live and sacrifice, and to go in peace after each Mass to love and serve the Lord means that the Mass is not really ended. Jesus, our Eucharistic Lord, accompanies and lives within us as we bring Him to all those whom He entrusts to us in our daily lives.

## **ADDITIONAL CATHOLIC RESOURCES**

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## Your Profession of Faith

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- † I renounce Satan, and all his works and empty promises.
- † I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
- † I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?
- † I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who today through the Sacrament of Confirmation is given to you in a special way just as he was given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost?
- † I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

### ***Your Profession of Faith. Why?***

The reason you are being “confirmed” is that you are making a public profession of faith. Prior to these promises – during Baptism and Confirmation – we first renounce Satan and his malevolent – evil – influences. This renunciation parallels turning away from unhealthy foods and drinks for better health. In other words, as you prepare your body to receive medicine or treatment by a physician, you prepare your soul to receive God’s grace and a relationship with God by rejecting evil.

Life encompasses more than just performing virtuous deeds; it also involves avoiding wrongdoing. God’s supremacy exceeds that of Satan, who was created as an angel and then rejected God. We are called to prioritize our relationship with God, even if it means diverging from societal norms or going against “peer pressure”. Your virtue is valuable even if it is rejected by those who are close around you or proves to be “unpopular.”

## Being a Practicing Catholic: The 5 Precepts

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### ***Why are there 5 “precepts” (guiding rules) of the Catholic Church?***

The Church’s precepts are “guardrails” to help us live a good and moral life. They are connected to the prayers and worship (Mass) of the Church. Each of us is responsible to examine our lives by following them. These are the minimum we are called to practice, to love God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. For more information, see Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 2041, 2024, 2043.

1. Attend Mass every Sunday.
2. Confess your sins at least once a year (confession to a priest).
3. Receive Holy Communion at least once a year.
4. Attend Mass and keep holy the holy days of obligation.
5. “Abstain” from meat and “fast” on special days. (Abstain from meat on Fridays of Lent, on Ash Wednesday, on Good Friday. Fasting means eating 1 meal on “Ash Wednesday” and “Good Friday”).

The faithful also are called to provide for the needs of the Church (example: financial monetary support and/or volunteering your time to support your parish).

### ***Recommended YouTube Video:***

“Father Mike Schmitz / Ascension Press: What Constitutes a Practicing Catholic?” (*Search Google using words in quotes*)

## More Online and Electronic Resources

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### U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://usccb.org>

*USCCB activities include: promoting Catholic worship and service; conducting religious, charitable, and social welfare work in the United States.*

### Catechism of the Catholic Church

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/catechism-cahtholic-church>

*The Catechism is a handbook that to help us understand the Christian faith and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.*

*The Catechism is available for sale on Amazon or wherever Catholic books are sold. If you would like a free Catechism, see Father Jim Ferry.*

### Magis Center (Father Robert Spitzer, S.J.)

<http://magiscenter.com>

*Catholic Jesuit Father Spitzer founded the Magis Center to explain the connection between science, reason, and faith.*

### Augustine Institute

<http://formed.org>

*The Augustine Institute is focused on Christ and is confident that only Divine Truth will satisfy human longing, championing the full and beautiful teachings of Christ and His Church and to share and make them accessible.*

### Relevant Radio – Radio AM 1430

<http://relevantradio.com>

*Relevant Radio, nationwide Catholic broadcaster on AM 1430, in NY and NJ, is also available via a free app. Visit your app store to get Relevant Radio app or listen at [relevantradio.com](http://relevantradio.com) website.*

## Common Catholic Prayers

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### “Our Father”

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. Amen.

### “Hail Mary”

Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

### “Glory Be”

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, a world without end. Amen.

### “Come Holy Spirit”

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your divine love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit,

Grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Eucharistic Prayers For The Faithful

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### An Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy.

### Prayer before receiving Holy Communion

May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy. Amen.

### Prayer before a Crucifix after receiving Holy Communion

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Thy face I humbly kneel and with burning soul, pray and beseech Thee, to fix deep in my heart, lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, true contrition for my sins and a firm purpose of amendment. While I contemplate with great love and tender pity, Thy five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me, and calling to mind the words that David, Thy prophet, said of Thee, my Jesus, "They have pierced My hands and feet, They have numbered all my bones." Amen.

### An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. In your infinite love and divine mercy, never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

## Main Altar and Church, Our Lady of Lourdes, West Orange



Main altar and mosaic:  
Bernadette kneeling before our Blessed Mother



View from Eagle Rock Avenue, West Orange

### MASSES

Saturday Vigil 5:30 pm  
Sunday Morning 7:30, 9:30, 11:30 am  
Monday – Friday 8:30 am

### CONFESSIONS

Saturday 4:15–5:00 pm or anytime by appointment  
Call 973.325.0110