

BECOMING

A PEOPLE OF GOD



Stewardship Thoughts

BY ALEXIS COUVILLON

Hello, Fellow Parishioners,

I don't usually give up anything for Lent, especially food! I usually add prayer or read a book worthy of being used as Lenten spiritual food. This year I did something very different for me—I did give up something—I gave up a couple of different TV programs I would consider to be “comfort TV.” As I write this, it's getting to be the end of Week 3, and I realize that I've had more time to think about my spiritual life, since I've turned off much more TV than anticipated. I'm thinking that it's time to cull those things, habits, and thoughts that don't measure up. Viewed with a different perspective, there are some intangibles that no longer have that same appeal. I have so appreciated the reflection time. I'm also appreciative of the fact that PBS goes back to its regular programming this week!

I hope you find these thoughts on Stewardship to be as prayerful as I did. Light a candle and immerse yourself in their warmth.

- *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, do it with reverence and gentleness, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ, may themselves be put to shame.” 1 Peter 3:15-16*
- *“You will recognize that you have love if, after having experienced annoyance and contradiction, you do not lose peace, but pray for those who have made you suffer and wish them well.” Jesus to St. Faustina*
- *“Begin with your emptiness and seek Him who can fill it.” Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen*
- *“Prayer should never be reduced to a task that has to be performed. Prayer is falling in love with God, who fell in love with us first.” Fr. Eamon Burke*
- *“Sometimes we want greater clarity when what we need is deeper trust.” Ann Voskamp*
- *“The most joyful people also happen to be the most generous. Generous giving is joy – to give is to become more God-like.” Allen Hunt*

Believe with me!

Father's Forum

BY FATHER DOUGLAS GUTHRIE

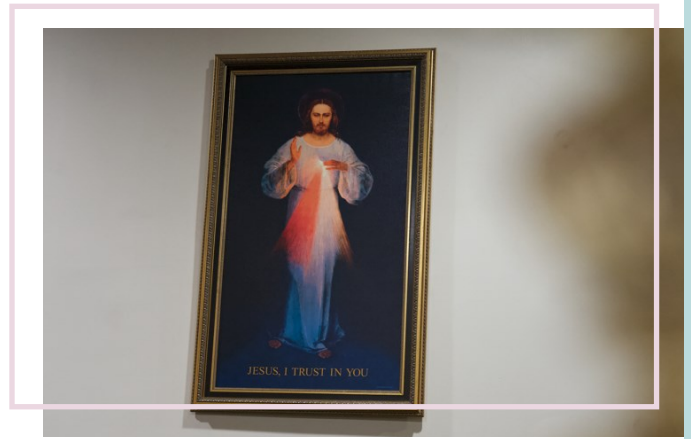
Jesus, I Trust in You!

Pope St. John Paul II designated the second Sunday of Easter as the Sunday of Divine Mercy. The Collect (opening prayer) of the Mass states:

God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed.

The Gospel is about “doubting” Thomas. I’ve always had the idea that Thomas wanted to believe that Jesus wasn’t really dead, but his common sense just wouldn’t let him. Come on, common sense tells us when someone’s dead, they’re dead—and no amount of wishful thinking will change that. Of course, if Jesus suddenly appears in front of you and tells you that He’s alive, you’d better believe Him—and that’s what convinced Thomas to give up his “common sense” and believe what he saw and heard.

That’s our challenge, too, to believe Jesus and trust in His mercy. To trust that He is with us, that He’s guiding us, that He’s helping us carry our crosses. Look again at the Collect (above). The Church is challenging us to grasp and rightly understand in what font we have been washed. You and I were dedicated to God in the font of baptism; we now belong to Him. Don’t forget that nor that He is always near, even when we cannot sense His presence.



Grasp and understand that we were reborn to eternal life when we were baptized, and no one can take that from us. Yes, we can abandon our faith (and eternal life) but no power that exists can take it from us, because there is nothing greater than the Spirit—who gives life. Grasp and understand by whose blood we were redeemed. Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection were not a piece of theater. They were brutally and cruelly real. Jesus did not pretend to suffer for us; it was real. That means we cannot say that He doesn’t understand. He lived life so we could learn how to live life. He suffered for the people He loved so they could suffer for those same people. He died for love of God and humanity and rose from the dead so we would never have to fear anything.

We are challenged to trust Jesus, more and more. Hope is the virtue whereby we trust God to keep His promises. When St. Faustina prayed, “Jesus, I trust in you,” she was exercising the virtue of hope. Jesus asked her to spread that message throughout the world around the time of the second world war when trust in God was desperately needed. I think it’s even more needed today. Trust Jesus, follow Jesus, believe in Jesus, love Jesus and your neighbor. Trust Him when you cannot see or hear Him. Finally, when “common sense” tells you that trusting someone whose dead is foolish and unrealistic, answer with: Jesus, I trust in you.

Fr. D.

The Liturgy Corner

The Mass, our Liturgy, is our great prayer of the Church. When we enter the Sacred Space of the Church, our life—our work life, life's daily concerns and crosses—are suspended. We should enter the church as those freed of those worldly concerns for a while, as the sacrifice of Jesus at the altar has freed us to be with His Father. On a weekly basis we can access the Kingdom of God, if we allow ourselves this suspension of reality. Our liturgies should be sensuous experiences with each of our five senses engaged, allowing us to be clothed in wonder, as we leave the material world in suspension.

Our liturgies are not to resemble some other service or worship. The lines between liturgy and conviviality, and liturgy and society, should be distinctly drawn. Ours is not some ordinary gathering; it is most important work. Remember that God had two reasons for removing his people from the slavery imposed upon them in Egypt: the first was to get them to the Promised Land; the second, which we tend to forget, was to allow God's People to worship Him as God commanded.

Above: my source is Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ignatius Press, published in 2000.

Meister Eckhart, a 13th century mystic and priest, said that nothing in the universe resembles God so much as silence. In that sense, then, to come into that silence is to come into the presence of the Divine.



The Scrutiny's

During Lent, our catechumens who are preparing for baptism at Easter, are called to come before the community for exorcisms and prayers. This takes place after the Liturgy of the Word on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. These rites are intended to purify the hearts and minds of the elect, to strengthen them against temptation, and to help them progress in holiness before they enter into their baptismal promises.

Father Douglas asks the assembly to pray in silence for the elect, then to join in intercessions for them. Father then lays hands on each of our catechumens and prays that they be delivered from the power of evil and become witnesses to the gospel. The same prayers are used for three consecutive weeks.

The readings during these three Sundays of Lent reflect our own spiritual journey—a turning away from sin to follow Jesus in a new way. On the Third Sunday of Lent, the Samaritan woman converses with Jesus at the well; her life is never the same. We meet Jesus each week at the altar in the flesh. How are we changed each week?



Rosie Charles, signs Book of the Elect



Rite of Election

Why Did Jesus Spit?

The gospel reading on the Fourth Sunday of Lent is the story of Jesus healing the man born blind near the Temple of Jerusalem. Jesus spits on the ground and kneads the clay, forming a paste that is placed on the blind man's eyes. Jesus instructs the man to go to the Pool of Siloam to wash. The blind man returns with his sight.

In the ancient Jewish tradition, spit was used by God to form Adam, kneading him out of the clay. Jesus using spit to knead the clay references that same creation story of Genesis. The blind man was instructed to wash in the Pool of Siloam, which is fed by the underground Gihon spring—the only source of water for Jerusalem. This same source of water is mentioned in Genesis as the source of water in the Garden of Eden, God's creation of paradise on earth.

The result of Jesus' healing is that He has re-created the blind man, making him new. "Kneading" in Hebrew means to work with clay. Another form of that Hebrew word translates to "potter." We are reminded of Isaiah 64:8, when Isaiah mentions that God is the potter, and we are the clay. Jesus has re-formed the man who was blind from birth.

Lent is about allowing God to transform us from dust and ashes into a vessel of His choosing. We become like the newly baptized and are re-born in the mercy and forgiveness of Christ Jesus.

During this Easter Season, may the Lord grant us the ability to experience the radiance of His mercy in ourselves and in our gifts to others as we share our best selves with the world.

Journey to a Sacred Place, Part 2

By Coni Perez

Part 1 of this journey appeared in the Fall 2022, Volume 2, edition of “Becoming.” To refresh your memory, or for those of you who may have missed it, the first paragraph is repeated to provide context.

The first thing our guide, Amer, told us was that “you are not on a vacation or a trip; you are on a pilgrimage.” Amer told us stories and the history of the places we visited. He imparted upon us his Catholic tradition: “I was born and grew up in this land. I will tell you what my grandparents told me, what they learned from their grandparents; the oral traditions that I have learned, spanning many generations over many centuries.” Our fifty pilgrims were led by three priests and a deacon. Our mornings started early, early enough to see the beautiful sunrises on the Sea Galilee. The food was fabulous—hummus, pita bread, falafel, and plenty of fresh fruit and veggies. Strong, black, Arabic coffee was always offered at the end of each meal. Here are a few highlights of my 12-day trip.

Capernaum

Another stop was Capernaum, where Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount, “The Beatitudes,” and fed the 5000. The Mount of the Beatitudes, which overlooks the Sea of Galilee. The Church of the Beatitudes is located here. The church is an octagonal building with the eight sides representing the eight beatitudes.

Gethsemane

This is my second time to visit the Holy Land, but the first time I’m impressed by trees that were over 2000 years old. They were in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. You may recall that this is the place where Jesus prayed on the night of the Last Supper. This time, however, after a few blinks, I realized that those 200-year-old trees were actually bearing fruit! Some of the trunks were more than eight feet wide. Some were hollowed

out; some were dried out, but they had new branches with olives!

Those old trees still bearing fruit stayed on my mind, and I wondered, “Will our works and deeds still be bearing fruit in 100 years from today? Will what we do, say, and plant today still bear fruit in 100 years?” As lay people, we have an apostolate: we have been called directly by Christ through our Baptism, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Confirmation, and sent to do and be His voice in the world today. Will we plant, water, and nurture those gifts that we have been given so that they bear fruit into the next century? The way we use our God-given gifts today will determine what fruit we harvest tomorrow.

Via Dolorosa

We prayed the rosary while walking the Via Dolorosa at 5 AM one morning. Since the stations are on public streets, those who wish to pray quietly and contemplate the mysteries of the rosary must start very early to avoid the daily happenings in the area. There are nine stations outdoors, with the last five stations in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This church is in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. We were blessed to be able to go into the room, which was the tomb of Christ, to kneel, to pray, and to touch the burial place and the original stone that enclosed the tomb. We celebrated Mass on the main altar at this church. Control of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is shared by several Christian denominations and secular entities with strict guidelines for any religious activity that takes place.

An Experience of a Lifetime

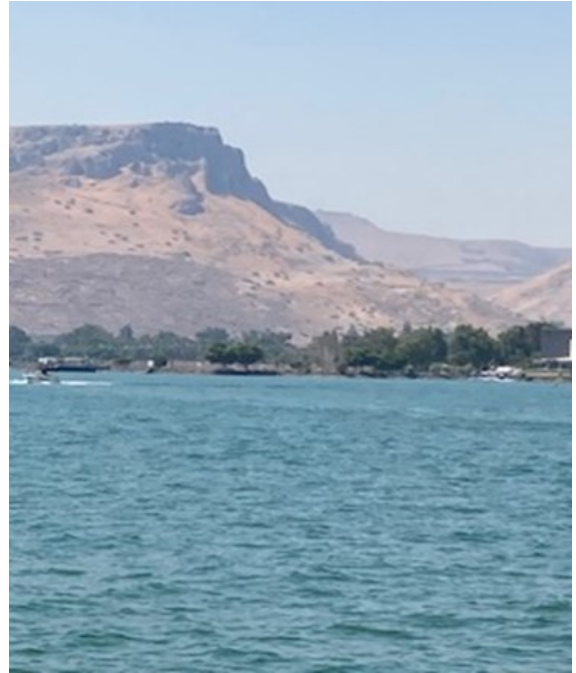
Going to the Holy Land is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I would encourage all to make both the sacrifice of time and money to go, see, and understand the geographical area where our Lord Jesus was born, walked, taught, healed others, lived his life, died, and was resurrected.

Journey to a Sacred Place, Part 2

Photos by Coni Perez



2000+ year old trees still bearing fruit.



Sea of Galilee

Mysta-What?

The Catechism describes mystagogy as a “liturgical catechesis that aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ” (CCC 1075)

Mystagogy is the process of initiation into “mysteries;” the period of post-baptismal catechesis for the newly initiated Catholic Christians or neophytes. It begins with reflection on the mysteries of the sacramental experience of initiation, and the Christian experience as the neophytes enter more fully into the life and unity of the community. This reflection is most intensive during the 50 days of the Easter Season and continues for the rest of their lives.

During this continuing period of study, the newly baptized are challenged to move out of the safety and nurturing embrace of the community to minister to a wider world of parish, neighborhood, workplace, and society. This is the beginning of a lifelong long search for the meaning and significance of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

How is your continuing catechesis going?

*May God and His wonderful compassion, grace,
and peace, continue to be with you and your loved
ones throughout this joyous Easter Season.*



Happy Easter!