

light of the world

SEE HOW HE SHINES AT ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



CHRISTMAS | 2021



Dear Friends,

As you know, life is filled with both delightful mysteries and frustrating predicaments. If there's only one thing we've learned in the last few years, it is that very point. But something else many have come to realize is that there has never been a more urgent need for us to attend to what is happening within us. When we allow ourselves the space and time (and silence) to focus on our own physical and spiritual wellbeing, we are only then able to reach out and bring hope to others.

It is my wish that in the new year, you decide to focus on your circle of influence, beginning with you. Our parish theme this year comes from a quote from St. Catherine of Siena:

Be who God meant you to be
and you will set the world on fire.

Oh! It is a process to become all who God meant us to be, and my mission and that of our team at St. Francis is to be there every step of the way. We have many opportunities to walk on this journey with you. May the following pages inspire you to take another step closer to who God meant you to be. I look forward to the new year with an expectant hope that you will be called to join us in trying something new and perhaps inviting a friend to join you!

Love,



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It's Impossible to Be Catholic

Jenny Connelly

Last summer I learned that it's impossible to be Catholic.

I grew up in a devout Catholic home and as a child I had a great, personal love for Jesus in the Eucharist. However, as I proceeded into my teenage and early university years, my faith began to vacillate between enthusiastic conviction and doubtful mediocrity. When I felt Catholic, I was Catholic. But in some seasons where the feelings would wear away, my faith would lose its legs.

Up until last summer, I would describe my relationship with Jesus as an “on again, off again” relationship. Yes, I loved Jesus, and I loved being with him, but would we end up together? I wasn't always sure. If my relationship with Jesus was on again, off again, then last summer I started slipping into a season of “off again.” Physically isolated by Covid-19 lockdowns, I found my spirit tumbling into spiritual isolation.

The loneliness wasn't new. I had experienced it in my life before, but it was amplified by pandemic isolation. Catholicism started to feel

like an absurdly difficult task that I had to complete all on my own. Jesus seemed distant and the Church's teachings started to be dismantled in my mind.

For the first time in my life, I reached a point where I started to believe that it was impossible to be a Catholic.

I had reached a point where a dramatic exit from the Catholic Church seemed certain for me. However, this didn't happen.

To this day, I am deeply grateful for the faithful friends who I had around me who did not judge me for my doubt, but who rather gently, yet persistently invited me to return to the Sacraments.

I hadn't been to confession for a long time, and one day I impulsively decided to return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Why not give it a final shot?

When I walked out of confession that day, I felt a peaceful assurance that what I wanted was not to leave the Church, but rather to be closer to Jesus. I didn't want to be flaky with Jesus anymore. No more "on again, off again." I wanted to be with Jesus for life.

But the thing is, although I felt peaceful walking out of confession that day, I also felt skeptical. I had gone to confession and had walked out feeling rejuvenated, but was it really that easy? I had been struggling with being a follower of Jesus for so long. I did believe that through confession my soul had been healed and that I was close to Jesus once more, but I knew I needed to reflect on the patterns that had led me to a crisis of faith, if I wanted to avoid a repeat.

How did I reach the point where I was inches away from leaving the Catholic faith that I loved, and still love, so dearly? Reflecting on my journey has been invaluable in reinforcing the faith I have today.

Last summer, I had not participated in the Sacraments in months due to the pandemic. My community had been largely severed due to the lockdowns. I was spiritually and mentally vulnerable, as many of us were last summer. However, I can see that the spiritual heaviness of the pandemic was not the sole reason that led me to consider leaving the Catholic Church.

For me, loneliness and struggles with a few of the Catholic Church's teachings were the main stumbling blocks I encountered in my faith. I believed these two issues were th

the main problems I faced as a follower of Jesus. But I was wrong. Loneliness and my issues with Church teachings were not the main problem.

The problem with my faith was that I was attempting to be a Christian without Christ. Through the years of my on again, off again relationship with Christ and the Catholic Church, I had reached a point where I was depending on myself for the strength to be a Christian. I was attempting

to manufacture grace out of the sheer grit of my own intellectual capacities and the strength of my own willpower.

I was even trying to pray on my own. If a prayer time was "good," it was because of my effort. If a prayer time was "bad," it was because I was weak. I had slipped into a worldview where I loved Jesus, but I didn't ask him for help.

As I invited the Lord back into my my heart and He mercifully reassembled the relationship that I had flattened with my doubt and self-dependence, he changed something within me.

Jesus showed me that it is impossible to be a Catholic. He showed me that it's impossible to be a Catholic without utterly depending on Him for the grace I need to walk the path of Christianity.

St. Therese of Lisieux understood the reality of our utter dependence on Jesus. She said, "It is your arms, Oh Jesus, which are the elevator to carry me to heaven!" My worldview changed: I went from living like I had to strong-arm my way to heaven to realizing that the very weakness I was trying to avoid was the key to closeness with Christ.

THE PROBLEM WITH MY FAITH WAS THAT I WAS ATTEMPTING TO BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT CHRIST.

The loneliness and struggles that I had once perceived as stumbling blocks were now transformed into profound opportunities for intimacy with Christ.

My doubts pulled me closer to God.

How can this be? By taking the mantle of human nature and ultimately dying on the Cross for my sins, Jesus took what is weak and suffering in us and transformed it.

The loneliness and struggles with the Church's teachings that I had experienced (and still experience) are no longer an occasion for me to turn away from Jesus. Rather, these struggles are now opportunities for me to turn to the Lord with even more fervency.

By the grace of God, when I now encounter seasons of loneliness, I see my loneliness as an opportunity to lean deeper into the heart of Jesus. On the Cross, Christ cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) Jesus knows the loneliness I carry in my heart and by stepping into my humanity he has created a space where my loneliness doesn't have to draw me away but rather closer to Him.

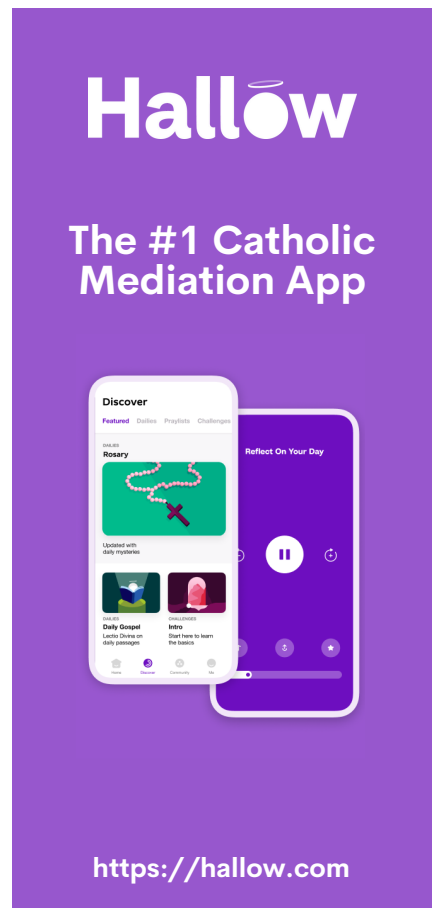
In those moments where I find it so hard to follow, instead of turning away from Jesus in despair or

frustration, my desire is to turn to Christ and say in my heart or out loud, "your grace is sufficient, Lord. In my weakness, your power is made perfect" (1 Corinth 12:9-11). "This is impossible for me, Lord, but what is impossible for me is possible for you" (Mt 19:26).

I have often gotten frustrated because the idea of "relying on grace" seems so abstract and unrelated to the practical struggles of everyday life. For me, speaking to Jesus either mentally or out loud in times of suffering or struggle has been a tangible way that I can lean into grace, rather than slipping into the old habit of self-reliance. I talk to Jesus with the simplicity of a little child, chattering away to her father.

To be a Christian, to be a Catholic, is impossible for me. It's impossible for all of us. But through Baptism, we have all been subsumed into a life of supernatural grace which empowers us to do what is otherwise not possible. As a follower of Christ who leans into grace and uses my weakness to propel me closer to Jesus, I—and you—can do the impossible.

Jenny is a freelance writer and host and producer of the Wide Open Spaces Podcast, which aims to build bridges between people who disagree by having humanizing conversations about controversial topics.





TEN SECONDS

Kayte Postle

I think everyone in their 20s and early 30s is searching.

We are searching for a place to belong, for connection, intimacy, purpose, and something greater than ourselves. Our hearts long and cry out for these things, and in our media-cell-phone-centric world, it's becoming increasingly difficult for us to find them in true authenticity. As a group I think we have a finely tuned radar for anything less than real in a world full of fake. We search for gold in a mountain-sized pile of plastic.

As someone who is on the cusp of turning 30, these same longings of my heart had become a physical ache. There were too many nights scrolling endlessly through Facebook or Pinterest, sitting in front of my TV watching *Frasier* on repeat to numb

the ache of my soul. Then in April of this year, my socially anxious self had ten seconds of crazy bravery and met up with a few young adults from the parish. Three strangers met at the local IHOP (now one of our regular haunts) and just hung out in good ol' fashioned fellowship. We left with the beginnings of true authentic friendship.

I am surprised at what 10 seconds of bravery can lead to. Suddenly I found myself finding exactly what I was longing for. Here are people living authentic lives of deep intimacy with one another and with God, and they welcome me just as I am, with no reservations, judgement, or agendas. That mountain of plastic suddenly gave way to a river of gold, flowing deep, steady, and plentiful. It has been an unending pouring out of love, joy, and support.

After all that hype, though, what does this look like exactly?

It manifests itself in three main ways: in our men's and women's groups, monthly events, and random get-togethers throughout the week.

Through our Men's and Women's Groups each week, the young adult women meet on Mondays at 6:30pm, and the young adult

MEN'S RETREAT

Men on Fire

w/ Bart Schuchts

"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled."

- Luke 12:49



TWO-DAY EVENT

3/11

6:30 - 9pm

&

3/12

8am - 4pm

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men meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. The end time varies slightly each week because we tend to be a pretty chatty bunch, but the official end time is 8:30 - 9pm. We join together for Bible study, faith building, a few snacks, and lots of good fun and laughs (and tears at times). Every week looks slightly different depending on the needs of the group. The thing that remains constant is the love and support of one another, and the great friendship we all share. Everyone is welcome with open arms; we are just here to love another and help each other walk towards Heaven.

Our monthly young adult events have ranged from a Bob Ross paint along, to a weekend retreat. Each month we engage in something different, with the purpose of growing closer together in friendship and faith. These typically occur on one Thursday a month around 7pm.

For our random meetups we have an ongoing GroupMe chat that everyone is welcome to join! There, someone will suggest coffee, dinner, a hike, a bonfire, or an invitation to just hang out. In this chat we also share different bits of news—our joys and sorrows, different prayer requests, life milestones, cute baby (and pet) pictures, and memes, to name a few.

What I cannot begin to express properly in words is the effect that this ever-growing group of people has had not only on myself, but on each individual person involved. I've witnessed the women literally circle around and pray deeply for a sister crying in anguish. I've seen marriages grow in love, commitment, and faith. I've seen young families draw closer together and closer to the Divine. I've seen individuals become more wholly and authentically themselves, stepping into who they are meant to be. I have and continue to see lives transformed for the better.

It's not all kittens and rainbows—that's not how life works. It is all so incredibly **Good**, though. In the pain, sorrow, joy, laughter, goofiness, and everything in between, it is just the greatest Good I have had the privilege of experiencing.

What will 10 seconds of crazy bravery do for you?

Come and see.

Upcoming Young Adult Get-togethers

*Men: Tuesdays, 6:30pm
starting 12/28*

*Women: Mondays, 6:30pm
starting 1/10*

*For info contact Molly at
mbee@stfrancisparish.net*

The Gift of a Simple Invitation

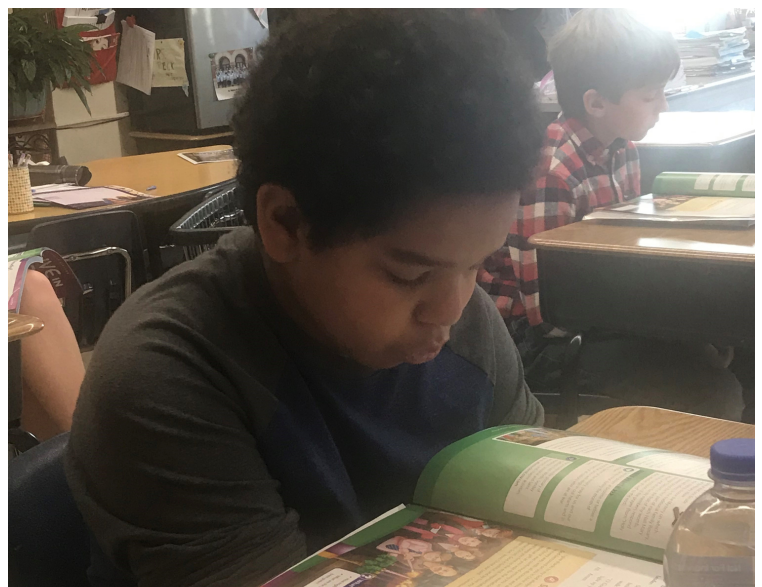
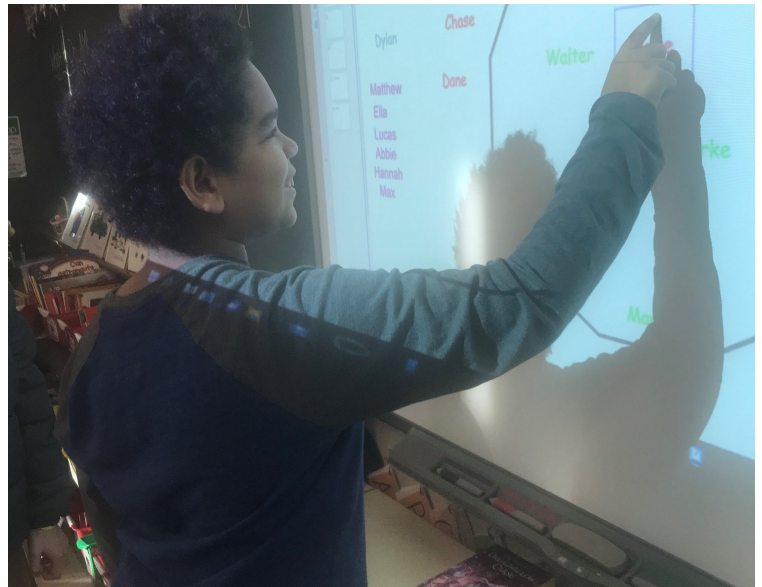
Jackie Dee Luscher

What does it mean to be Christian? More specifically, what does it mean to be Catholic? We're all on our own journey with our eyes toward heaven, but in this married couple's endeavor, Cyndi and Dave McPhaden have learned that it's Catholicism that is the actual bedrock of all Christian faith—the Truth. In the last couple years, they have immersed themselves in all the wealth of St. Francis de Sales to become ambassadors for Christ.

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

The McPhadens became disillusioned and heartbroken by the ever-growing rise of progressivism they had been witnessing in churches. Cyndi especially mourned over this and the way she viewed mainstream churches wanting to be involved more in social issues, taking precedence over God and Scripture. They had to find a church that aligned with their own hearts.

Cyndi said she cried many prayerful tears looking for an answer, something to guide them. "I searched the Bible thinking, 'OK, there has to be an answer, and I don't know what you want us to do, Jesus, but I know we





**NEVER
UNDERESTIMATE
AN INVITATION**

trust in you.' I just kept finding Scripture. I would pray and then open the Bible and start reading. St. Paul would say NOT to go the way of the world. I mean, it was like it was talking to me."

DISCOVERING ST. FRANCIS

Cyndi and Dave knew Jesus was trying to lead them but didn't know where they were supposed to go. Cyndi's daughter Bethany mentioned a St. Francis parishioner she knew, Mark Koch, who told her about his mother's involvement with the St. Francis grandparent ministry. Apprehensive to attend at first, Cyndi said they found acceptance right away and great joy in the people and Scripture they learned about.

That first year, they were taught about saints who had been grandparents. "It was just so reassuring that there is a place that really looks at Scripture and the teachings of the beginning of Christianity," Cyndi said. "It just hit me like a brick."

FULL IMMERSION

Since then, the couple has experienced the fullness of the parish and have even taken on formal roles, recently participating in Alpha as assistant table leaders, and in RCIA. They hope to be confirmed soon. Cyndi has even moved to her second year in Walking with Purpose, she serves during Adoration hours, and she's registered for the parish's upcoming women's retreat in January.

Cyndi's curiosity in Catholicism heightened during her time working at Arlington Care Center in Heath, and she spoke of caring for a particular dying resident. "I walked in her room and knew she was nearing death," Cyndi said. "It was just us, and she was still alert but confused."

Holding Cyndi's hand, the woman started reciting the beginning of Hail Mary but couldn't remember the rest. Not knowing the prayer and so unable to assist her, Cyndi said the woman simply fell asleep while she retreated to her office to cry. With compassionate concern, Cyndi

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A journey of faith, that takes as long as it takes.

concluded that she would learn to help her patients and was given a quick course in Catholicism by a good friend.

She was taught how to pray the rosary and partnered with another past pal who had the hobby of making rosaries, which Cyndi would take and leave in her desk drawer to share with the center’s distressed and dying. After Cyndi would place one in their hands and pray with them, they would calm and go to sleep. While not fully knowing it at the time, Cyndi realized it was the Holy Spirit at work, wondrous in its power.

MEET ZEKE

After a short time attending St. Francis, Dave said he could see a difference in Cyndi, and her 10-year-old grandson Zeke, or “Ziggy,” could see it too. “Everybody at St. Francis has just been so welcoming and so friendly and so genuine; it’s great, though it’s very disappointing for Cyndi,” Dave said, “because she really grieved about leaving her former church.”

Leaving those past church roots behind them and starting parish life anew was meant to be, Cyndi insists. Zeke has embraced it as well, giving his time as an altar server and attending the Parish School of Religion (PSR). He received his first communion in the spring, and all with help of other members of the parish dropping much to assist in tutoring him so he could keep up with his preparation classes. He’s also registered for Damascus’ upcoming Catholic youth summer camp.

Zeke said it’s Sunday school he likes the best. “What I like about it is that at the end of each class we pray,” he says. And he continues this practice each night, praying with Cyndi for others, and especially family members he wants to see discover the power of faith and parish life, too.

PRAYERS FOR DAVE

In all, Cyndi said being at St. Francis has helped in so

many ways, including being there for Dave, who has been living with cancer this past year. “Wonderful things happen and we’re happier, I think, than we have ever been—more at peace, and through all this with Dave, and the people there just seem to know and keep track and care.”

Both have grown immensely in their spiritual lives. Cyndi was excited to learn in the recent Called and Gifted program about a gift given to her from the Holy Spirit. “Everybody’s supposed to have a gift, and we just went because we thought it’d be fun. Well, it hit me like a ton of bricks because what they were describing was what I had experienced since I was in my early teens,” she said – the ability to discern spirits, both good and bad.

She felt the best of those spirits the first time she walked into St. Francis. “I mean, I just knew it.” She also was identified as having the “charism,” or gift, of intercessory prayer.

She has a multitude of stories to share when it comes to these powerful gifts. Ask her about them sometime and introduce yourself to Dave and Zeke if you haven’t had the opportunity to meet them already. For they are gifts to all of us at St. Francis, inspirations with their light, love, and spirits.





LET THE LITTLE ONES COME

Molly Peck

Explaining our family's experience at St. Francis de Sales School is difficult to put into words. We toured the school during Catholic Schools Week several years ago, and the tour was led by an eighth-grade student. We were looking for a school that aligned with our family's values and beliefs. The way the guide conducted herself was astonishing. She was patient,

respectful, and confident. My husband and I knew right away that St. Francis was what we wanted for our children.

The leadership, teachers, staff, and volunteers at St. Francis are truly there for the right reasons. Every one of them walks into the school building every day knowing that they are there to do God's work.

They love our children just as much as we love our children. They tirelessly live out the example of Jesus:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked,
“who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child to him and placed the child among them.
And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like
little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.
Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the
greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one
such child in my name welcomes me.”

Matthew 18:1-5

Being a teacher is an extremely difficult job, and it takes a very special person to fill those shoes. Do you remember when the whole world came to a halt and schools shut down because of COVID? I do! We had just been blessed with baby number six. Our whole world was flipped upside down, just like most other families. I became a teacher overnight, and I never even applied for the position. Trying to homeschool our kids during that time was a disaster, and I needed help. Since then, I have valued and appreciated our teachers and what they do on a whole new level. Every chance I get, I am asking if they need help with anything because I now know what it is like to be a teacher. I see our teachers pouring their hearts and souls into each child at St. Francis, because they care. The patience, understanding and love they display daily is beautiful and inspiring.

With six kids in the house, the youngest being 19 months, it has been a struggle to find the time to volunteer; however, we wanted to make a commitment and become more involved in our children's education. It has been such a privilege helping teachers in various classrooms—watching the children grow in their faith and knowledge and enjoying time with faculty, staff, and other volunteers.

A few weeks ago, I was in the school on a Friday morning. As I was getting ready to walk through a set of double doors, I noticed the kids were all heading back to class, because Mass had just ended. I opened the door for them to walk through, and, without exception, every single child that walked through that door acknowledged me and said, “Thank you!”

I was shocked! I have opened lots of doors for adults, and many times I am not even noticed. I thought for sure Father Dave must have just given a homily about saying “please” and “thank you,” but he hadn't. It should make every parent smile from ear to ear to know that your children are displaying respect—even when you are not present.

There are so many great things happening at St. Francis, right now—it is on fire. Something new this year is called Thrive, which are get-togethers centered around faith, family, and fun. During Thrive, the kids and families in each grade are growing closer together and forming genuine relationships within our community. We also have the classical education model being implemented into our classrooms. The classical education model will give the kids a solid foundation for the future, so they can enrich the lives of others. Everyone at St. Francis de Sales School is helping us raise our children to be the leaders this world so desperately needs.

the messy family project
with mike & allie hernon

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- We believe your family deserves an educational partner who **listens to you** and who **shares your values**, beliefs, and desires to help form your children into morally aware, critically thinking, high-performing and joyful persons.
- We deeply understand that children deserve to be cared for across all facets of his or her development—mind, body and soul—in a safe and secure environment where he or she can thrive and **become who God meant him or her to be**.
- We are the only Catholic school in Central Ohio migrating to a **Classical Education** environment. Our model, methods, and content are tried and true in developing the whole person, while offering a robust academic education. **Secular political and social agendas do not influence what or how we teach in our classrooms**. Our approach awakens in children a love for truth, a desire to experience clarity, and cultivates a mindset of perseverance in seeking knowledge and understanding, as they discover their place in this world and God’s plan for them.



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The Bible is His story. The life you live is Your story. Where the two meet is THE story and that's the greatest story you could ever share with the world! Finding the words that express what and how God has changed your life can be a challenge, but here are a few tips to get started.

His Story

First, let's review. God's story can actually be broken into 4 simple proclamations called the *kerygma*:

- Humanity was **CREATED** by God out of pure love and for love. He made each of us in His image and likeness.
- We were **CAPTURED** by original sin which keeps us from living fully as God intended. Our relationship with God and each other was broken.
- We have been **RESCUED** by God through Jesus.
- We now have an obligation to **RESPOND** to God and his love and mercy toward us. Remember, no response is still a response.



Crafting Your Glory Story

Tina Burtch &
Angel Schneider

THE Story

Through your lived experience you've come to the conclusion that God indeed has a plan for your life. He desires your good and, most importantly, wants to spend eternity with you! Now you simply have to take His Story and combine it with your own story. Here's a simple guide to practice:

- Hi, my name is...
- I would like to tell you about how God...
- Share **Your Story**

Some express fear in being so bold, but the honest truth is that no one can argue with your story, how it made you feel and where it's leading you today and into the future. So, be bold! The kingdom of heaven is depending on it.

The mighty one has done great things for me;
holy is his name.

Luke 1:49

Your Story

How is the Lord working in your life right now?
Finish these statements:

- I was:

- Jesus did:

- I am now:

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands an accounting for the hope that is in you.

1 Peter 3:15



Thoughts from a Convert

Diana Baus

I didn't grow up with any type of formal religion. I do remember having a Bible, though. My mom said that she "used to be" Catholic and she had a rosary in her jewelry box, which was so intriguing to me. It seemed like such a sacred thing to her even though she wasn't Catholic anymore. She had me baptized in a non-denominational church when I was a baby. My mother said she did this so I could make the choice of what religion I wanted to be. Even though I heard little about God in my home, I knew Him very well as a child.

I started to look for more of Him at different times in my life, though I always felt like something was missing. I went to a lot of Protestant and other non-denominational churches. I ended up leaving the churches I would visit because they didn't feel like home. I did see a Bible at every one of those churches, though.

In my late 20's I met a man who was Catholic. Once again, I was intrigued. I went through Catholic instruction

through weekly RCIA sessions at his parish to learn more. I remember being shocked that I never saw one rosary during that time—I thought there must be rosaries all over the place in a Catholic church! I did see a Bible, though. Years later, I started to read the Bible, if every church had one, I thought, there must be something to this Bible thing!

When I finally opened a Bible for myself, I realized that the book I was reading was actually a history book with all the answers for life that I had been looking for. It was so interesting to me that I'd heard about people not believing in the Bible when it was written despite the many history books we read but never question being true. God sent Jesus to be with us here on earth, a walking, breathing version of himself. A model for us to follow. I loved reading about His interactions with people in the Bible. It was evident that all I truly needed to live a holy life of blessings, was to ask, "what would Jesus do?"

As I learned more about the Bible, I thought about the Catholic faith in comparison to other churches I'd been to. I noticed that we had Jesus on the cross, behind the altar. Big, bold, and right in the middle! I'd seen crosses in other churches, but Jesus wasn't on them. That really struck me: what a depiction of love and sacrifice. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind. What an easy thing to do when His love is so beautifully displayed for us. I would grow in humility and love just looking at Him and contemplating His sacrifice for us.

The Catholic Church has another thing that I have never seen in any other church: the Eucharist. Communion may be given out at other churches, but it wasn't every Sunday, and it was more of a symbol. In the Bible, Jesus states, "this is my body." I'm so glad that we believe that these weren't just words that Jesus uttered; they were truth. He meant them. He loved us so much that He wanted to remain with us in such a way that He would become our bread of life. Knowing what I know now, I want to receive the Eucharist as much as I can! There is an opportunity to receive the Eucharist every day, if not at our church, at a neighboring one.


Before I made my First Reconciliation as part of RCIA, I had heard many horror stories about the process from my Catholic friends and family. I was so nervous to go for the first time. I did go, though, because I knew that the Bible is a living document, and it has always been relevant to our current place and time. I know Jesus gave the apostles the authority to forgive sins on His behalf. Why wouldn't that be true today? I knew the priest had authority and God was using Him as a vessel of His love and mercy. I went to reconciliation, and the order of everything and the prayers I learned went out the window! I forgot the steps and the priest had to help me to remember. Most importantly in my mind, I forgot the act of contrition, even after I'd worked on it so hard! I asked the priest if I could say my

own prayer, and he said, "always, please do." Now I always say my own version, telling God that I am sorry, asking His forgiveness and inviting Him to help me do better. I can't tell you the amount of healing I have done in reconciliation saying my own prayer; it opened my heart to the whole process.

I would be remiss if I didn't speak about the community in our church. Let's talk about the commandment Jesus thought was second-most important: "love your neighbor as yourself." This community has taught me to love. Through discipleship groups, faith formation opportunities, parishioners asking if they can pray for me and my family, and so many bright lights who just seem to be at the right place to make me feel included and comfortable. This love isn't just in the church, it spills out into the world.

I am so happy to be a part of a church that steeps itself in scripture and love. It has been a journey, but I'm so glad to finally be *home*.

Light in the Darkness
Women's Retreat
Saturday, 1/22 | 8:30am - 3:30pm | Johnson Hall



With Sonja Corbitt, Catholic Evangelista

Learn more & register at stfrancisparish.churchcenter.com

From the Mouths of Babes (and the parents that love them)

We've all heard the saying, "it takes a village" and never before has that been truer! In order to help our kids grow in faith and virtues despite this toxic world, we have to give them exposure to the beauty and truth found in the Catholic Church. There are so many great things for our kids at St. Francis. Don't take our word for it. Check out what kids and their parents have to say about it!



BAPTISM

MOM: Preparation for my child's baptism is really an opportunity for me as a parent to reconnect to my faith. I learned long ago that Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism, my son and daughters are freed from original sin and reborn as children of God.

CHILD: I'm way too young to really know what's going on here, but from the pictures I would say I am clearly loved and made special by adoption into God's family and my church community on this day!



CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

MOM: The wonder of my youngest child is inspiring in our parish's Catechesis of the Good Shepherd sessions. I can see my child receive and enjoy the most essential elements of our faith—the announcement of God's love for her and all His creation.

CHILD: I love the quiet special place where I get to go to learn about Jesus. I learn that He is also called the Good Shepherd. I learn to listen to His voice, and I try to follow Him. I tell my mommy all about it and she learns things too.



DISCIPLE ME - PARISH SCHOOL OF RELIGION

DAD: I feel overwhelmed when I think of teaching the faith to my kids. Between what I've forgotten since my youth, what I just never learned or the fact that I'm Dad and they don't want to listen, I'm grateful for help from volunteer teachers at the parish. My kids hear Bible stories and do activities that teach both about Jesus and give an experience of His love.

CHILD: Seeing my friends every week and learning about the faith is so much! Our teachers love us and remind me of Jesus by being there for us and teaching us what they know.



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

MOM: Summer can be looooong and we love to break it up in a fun hands-on Bible learning experience for our 1st and 3rd grader! We're excited because they'll get a brand-new perspective during next summer's VBS by exploring God's awesomeness. I know our kids will form a rock-solid faith for the road ahead.

CHILD: I wouldn't miss VBS for anything! My friends are all there, I get to meet new people, laugh, dance, eat and have a ton of fun! I always learn something new about how God loves me and takes care of me.



FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

DAD: I knew that preparation for both First Communion and First Reconciliation typically begins during the 2nd-grade year, and I was excited, but not really prepared to explain it all to my daughter. The good news is that I didn't have to do the prep work alone. The teachers helped get her ready. The parent part of the preparation was way better than I thought it would be. I definitely learned a thing or two for myself along the way!

CHILD: When I learned about what Communion really is I was so happy. Jesus loves me so much. He guides me every day and gives me power through the Eucharist to do anything!



ELEVATE MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH MINISTRY

DAD: I wanted my son to truly discover the person of Jesus Christ in his life—how much he loves him and that he wants to have a relationship with him. He was able to understand the reasons behind many of the things we do in the church today, all while growing closer to Jesus.

YOUTH: Going to Elevate is the highlight of my weekend. All the people there are great, and I miss it when I can't be there. I love having a conversation with Jesus during prayer. He really does hear us if we listen to Him.



CHOSEN CONFIRMATION

MOM: I'm so grateful to send my third child through Chosen. The thought-provoking program in community, with mature discussions, is exactly what our teens need in learning to have a close relationship with God as they grow as humans and Christians.

YOUTH: I've been able to embrace my faith in a way that would not have been completely possible before. I can't wait to put on the armor of God at my Confirmation. It's going to be the best night ever!



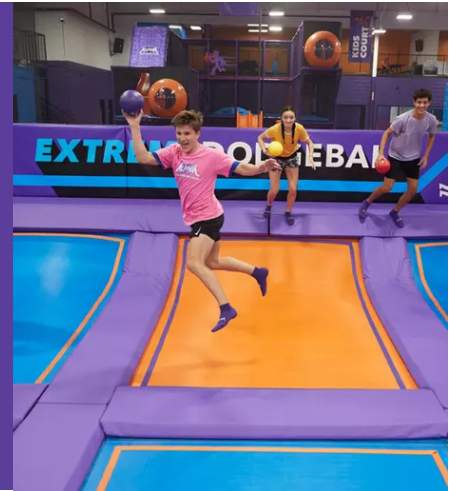
YOUTH MINISTRY NEW YEAR KICKOFF

Sunday, 1/9 | 7 - 9pm



Complete waiver at
www.altitudeheath.com

Contact Molly for info
mbee@stfrancisparish.net



SUMMIT HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH MINISTRY

DAD: I know how important my friendships are to me and I wanted to give my son an opportunity to be surrounded by peers from like-minded families to grow in relationship with Jesus and understand more deeply the beauty of a life lived in Christ.

YOUTH: Youth group is an experience that I'll never forget. Growing up, it was always hard to make friends. I felt isolated in a sense, and I felt I had no one my age to talk to about my faith. Being a part of youth group has given me friendships, and a great faith filled community. My faith has grown ever since I joined. Despite hard times, the people you meet at youth group will always be there for you.



YOUTH RETREATS & CAMPS

MOM: Fr. Dave always encouraged us to send our kids on a retreat and now we understand why! Our kids are totally changed after their first retreat. Our family's favorite camp is Damascus, which answered a legitimate need to provide an environment for our kids that is rooted within the Catholic tradition, is joy filled and challenges them to live the adventure of their Catholic faith through an encounter with Jesus Christ and His Church. Youth retreats and camps cross a wide range of topics, lengths and destinations, all with one goal in mind: to create an encounter with Jesus!

YOUTH: Recently, I was in Adoration, and I didn't really expect much but as I was sitting there, I felt this wave of peace rush through my body. And I was just sitting there with Jesus. Neither was talking we just sat there and eventually I understood that through the silence he was answering a question that I had had on my heart for a long time. What did I need to do to be good enough for Jesus to love me? He told me that I didn't have to prove I was good enough for him. He loved me the way I was. It was such an amazing experience that I'll remember forever!

Learn more about all the ways kids can get involved by clicking the Get Involved tab at www.stfrancisparish.net.

Hidden Messages in a Beloved Carol

Jackie Dee Luscher

The Christmas song, “The 12 Days of Christmas,” sometimes interpreted as a countdown to Christmas Day, in fact has to do with the 12 days following it, also known as Twelvetide. The period begins with the birth of Christ and ends with the coming of the three wise men on January 5, also known as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day, when newborn Jesus was recognized as the son of God.

While the exact origins of the song are unknown, the consensus is that it first appeared in the late 18th century in a book as a children’s memory game.

However, in researching the song, it’s written that the song may have been a secret teaching tool for Catholics during the 16th through 19th centuries, when teaching the faith was often illegal. To hide the important elements of Catholic teaching, verses were made into veiled works that

taught the church’s most important tenets. The song is thought to be one of those teaching tools.

Many variations of the lyrics have existed at different points. The song most of us are familiar with today comes from an English composer named Frederic Austin in 1909. And it endures, with each gift in the song symbolizing a different aspect of the Catholic faith.



PARTRIDGE IN A PEAR TREE is Jesus Christ. Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge, the only bird that will die to protect its young.

2 TURTLE DOVES are The Old and New Testaments. In this gift, the singer finds the complete story of Judeo-Christian faith and God’s plan for the world.

3 FRENCH HENS are Faith, Hope and Charity, the theological virtues. This gift hearkens back to Corinthians 1:13, the love chapter written by the apostle Paul.

4 CALLING BIRDS are the four gospels and/or the four evangelists. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

5 GOLDEN RINGS are the first five books of the Old Testament. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

6 GEESE A-LAYING are the six days of creation. Each egg is a day in creation, a time when the world was “hatched” or formed by God.

7 SWANS A-SWIMMING are the seven sacraments. Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders.

8 MAIDS A-MILKING are the eight beatitudes. The eight blessed include: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the

mEEK, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

9 LADIES DANCING are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

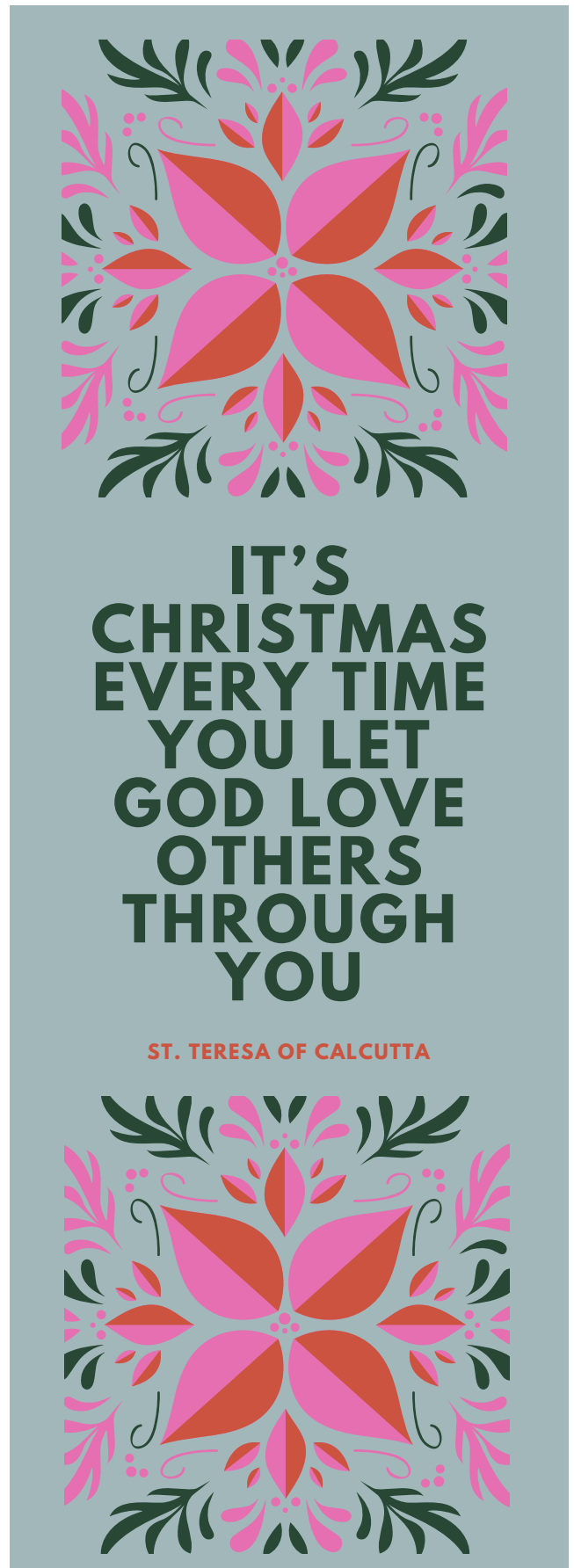
10 LORDS A-LEAPING are the ten commandments.

11 PIPERS PIPING are the eleven faithful apostles. There were 12, but when Judas betrayed Jesus, there were only eleven men who carried on the gospel message.

12 DRUMMERS DRUMMING are the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed.

In times past, when most societies were rural, few people worked in the dead of winter. It was a time when many were spending long, dark days inside their homes, looking forward to winter's chill giving way to the spring thaw. So, devoting a dozen days to prayer, reflection, and attending church was not a huge undertaking. Yet with the coming of the Industrial Age and the regular year-round work schedules it brought, finding time to continue the activities that had been traditionally associated with the twelve days of Christmas became all but impossible for most people.

So the passing of the twelve-days custom probably had as much to do with "progress" as with anything else. As fewer and fewer churches and families participated in the tradition, it was all but lost. Yet this obscure poem that was later turned into the song lives on. And the twelve days described are actually wonderful and complete pictures of the Catholic faith.



Joy Undimmed: The Way of St. Francis School

Edward Watson

We need to start with the end in mind. Here is the end that God Almighty has called me to: I have a job. My job is not complicated, but it is not simple. My job is this: To help EVERY member of my family become a joyful saint.

As a parent, I am the primary religious educator of my children. This means that, in our family, the name of Jesus, Our Lady, and the Saints come up a lot. We talk about the lives of the saints, we pray and read Scripture, we attend Mass together, we sing, we monitor what our

children watch and what they are exposed to and have access to. It means that I send my children to an authentically Catholic school that shares and reinforces the work I do at home. I am not offloading the physical, intellectual, and religious formation of my children to the school—we are partners in the work of raising my children. That is why I send my children to St. Francis.

My friends and colleagues at St. Francis are amazing human beings. They display the ability to educate, love, forgive, endure, and provide for students, and it is beyond the capacity of most people to understand. These teachers are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, mentors, confidants, and role models to hundreds of students each year. Their daily dedication is staggering and is quite frequently saintly.

There is no doubt that our academic and extracurricular achievements are important. The school excels in all areas of student life, but at St. Francis there is more. We seek to form the whole human person—mind, body, and spirit with the understanding that we are made in the image and likeness of God. When we know this and live this, excellence is sure to follow.



In his book, *New Teacher Induction*, Dr. Harry Wong Ed.D discusses new teacher formation and induction and the importance of effective teachers. “If well-trained, competent, caring teachers were present in every classroom, we would witness a staggering INCREASE in student achievement, motivation, and character improvement...” (Wong, 2003, p.22). Now, Dr. Wong is of course referring to the research available regarding student performance, but I would strongly argue that the role of the teacher in the classroom as it relates to the religious formation and evangelization of the students in his or her care is no less impactful. “Teachers are the single most important influence on student progress” (Wong, 2003, p.22).

Make no mistake, parents are and should be the primary religious educators of their children. With that said, what happens when parents were not formed themselves? What if parents have not had a powerful encounter with Our Lord? What better support than that found within the classroom to effectively develop their child and, for the parents themselves, from among all the amazing offerings for adults here at St. Francis Parish.

A teacher who has had an encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ and shares that encounter with others can form a classroom of missionary disciples—a classroom of

saints that our culture desperately needs. The teacher need not be perfect, but the teacher does need to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are blessed by a staff who understands the importance of their own spiritual health for themselves for the success of their students. A great teacher with an ongoing relationship with Our Lord draws students onward towards Christ. I’ve witnessed it, and we have that in spades at St. Francis.

How do I know if all this is working, if the spiritual health of our teachers is intact and if its effects are positively impacting our students? I humbly submit the Joy Test. I see that our entire community, teachers and students alike, despite all the ups and downs of the past few years and given all the times of deep loss, sorrow, and trouble, have a Joy that cannot be dimmed. They have this Joy because they have encountered and continue to encounter a Love beyond our understanding. Joy is the surest sign of the presence of God.

Interested in learning more about enrolling your child at St. Francis? Schedule a private tour after the new year! Call 740.345.4049 or email enroll@stfrancisparish.net.



Journey of Discovery

Katherine Kraft

“Be who God meant you to be,” I heard Fr. Dave say as he looked around the room. I thought, “Sounds great, Fr. Dave. But how do I do that? Where do I start?” I started dissecting that sentence and saying it slowly over and over. What does it mean to “Be who God meant you to be?” I have recently been wrestling with this question. I have heard many times that God created each of us with a specific purpose in mind and a mission for each of us to accomplish. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” (Jeremiah 1:5). OK, so if God wanted ME in the world for a very specific purpose and gave ONLY me the skills, gifts and talents needed to accomplish His work, **how do I find out what my purpose is**, what mission I am to accomplish? As I sat in the church contemplating these very questions, I was struck by the visual reference to a ship’s wheel behind our parish crucifix. Then I remember the part of the church from the doors up to the sanctuary is called the nave, which comes from the Latin word *navis* meaning ship. My imagination began to stir. I had just returned from a cruise pilgrimage. I can absolutely liken this journey of discovery to a voyage on a ship!

WHO WILL BE MY FELLOW PASSENGERS?

In making any type of trip, it is always more enjoyable to have others join you. As I consider fellow passengers for this journey, I don’t have specific people in mind, but I do have specific characteristics that I want us to share as we set sail to reach our goal of finding out God’s purpose for our lives. I want to be with people who seek a deeper relationship with God, people who I



have something in common with and who I can easily relate and talk to and people who want more from life! It turns out that as I set out in my boat and sail to different destinations of parish community gatherings, I meet many people like this—and they want to join me on my journey!

What a blessing to have company! Any time I get lost, someone else uses their gifts and talents to help get me back on track. If I became too weary or tired from steering, someone else takes the wheel. Together we decided where we can go next.

WHERE WILL I FIND PROVISIONS?

Ah, how to be sustained with food for the duration of the journey—sometimes that can be tricky depending on where you are going. My fellow passengers and I make sure we make stops every week to attend Sunday Mass. One of our passengers, a very learned scholar, taught me the importance of Mass as food for our journey. He said, “Did you know that Jesus, God’s Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is fully present in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the host?” Since one of our goals was to become closer to God, we need to receive the host (also called the Eucharist which means “thanksgiving”) every week during our journey. **The more we all attend Mass and receive Jesus, the more we feel Him change our hearts.** I personally find that I was grow closer to Him just as I had wanted, I also find myself wanting to listen more along the way.

WHAT MAP DO WE USE?

When I began my journey, I was just kind of traveling on my own, going wherever I would find places, people, activities that I would enjoy. And, although I met many people who joined me, I still needed direction. Some of my fellow passengers and I talked about this, and they suggested that we use a map. “Hmm,” I thought. “What map is there that would help us grow closer to God, **help us build better relationships** among ourselves and help

us discover who God meant us to be?” That’s when someone shouted out “The Bible!”

Of course! How brilliant! Let’s use Scripture, the Word of God Himself. Who better to lead us on this journey of discovering our purpose than the One who created us! “OK, but wait,” I said. “That’s a long book which will take us way too long to read. How exactly are we going to use that to guide us?” And that’s when my learned scholar friend enlightened me again. He described how in Scripture not only do we read about God Himself becoming human as Jesus, the Son of God, and modeling for us exactly how to live, but we also have countless prayers and the entire story of creation through salvation history when Jesus sacrificed himself.

“Yes,” another passenger piped up. “And the Bible is also full of an assortment of characters—some honest and noble, some that are flawed and have been tempted to sin just as we are and, of course, the villainous ones that are just plain not nice. By reading about all of these, though, we can see ourselves in some of them, learn from the mistakes and repetitive sin that some of them fall into and also be inspired by others’ virtuous actions that **teach us how to live out our lives as better disciples of Christ.**”

HOW CAN I GET A DIRECT LINE TO THE CAPTAIN?

As we continue our journey, it is easy to become weary. We need a captain, but who? Our discussion led us to conclude that just because we are physically steering the ship, it does not mean that we are physically our own captain. I learned that God is the captain of our ship! Wait. What? How is that possible? My fellow passengers helped me to see the answer—through prayer.

First, we all had to think about how we defined prayer. It is not just a list of petitions to God nor just of thanking

God for blessings (although these are, indeed, types of prayer). It is supposed to be a conversation. My learned scholar friend led this discussion and said, “**Prayer is where we come to rest in God.** Yes, we bring him our troubles (which He knows but still loves to hear us tell Him), but then we need to quiet ourselves and listen as it says in one of the Psalms in the Bible 'Be still and know that I am God.' (Psalm 46:10). We need to listen to what He wants us to know, what our beloved Father wants to tell you, his precious Son or Daughter. After all, how can we possibly know who He made us to be if we don't ask Him, right? And to do that, **we need to know Him.** And how we get to know Him is how we get to know anyone—by making time to spend with Him.”

Oh. My. Goodness! That hit me so hard. How many times had I spent so much time asking God for help or just praying prayers I was taught, but I never actually just sat in His presence to be with Him, to spend time with Him, to get to know Him. I firmly resolved to start setting aside time in my day for our conversations. My fellow passengers and I all agreed that the more we have done this, we have found two things that have happened: 1) We want to spend MORE time with Him as we find His presence peaceful and comforting; and 2) We are starting to become familiar with His voice as we really listen to hear Him and learn how **He wants to guide us in our lives and unfold His amazing plans for us.**

Did we reach our destination and find out who God meant us to be? Well, I learned that that is the beauty of this Journey of Discovery—it doesn't end! It just keeps getting better. We continue to meet more people on the way who share these same common goals and love learning all that I did and more as we sail these seas of life.

Our boats always have room for more who wish to come, set sail, explore, and discover what God wants to reveal to you on this journey.

Will you join us?



HOWARD THURMAN'S

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among the people,
To make music in the heart.



ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



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