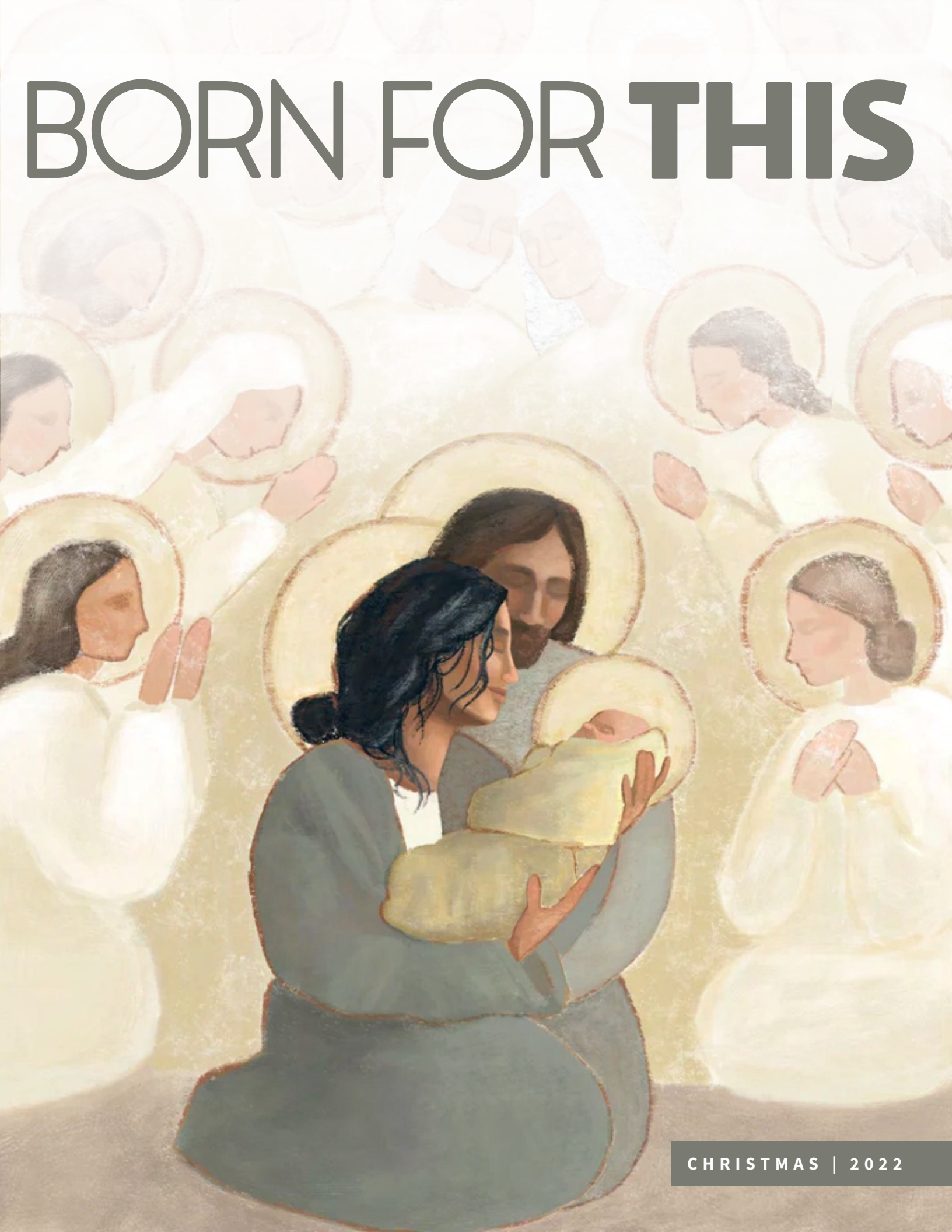


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Fill 'er up, Jesus!



Dear Friends,

Jesus' birth into our world came at the perfect time and brought comfort and joy.

He is still bringing us joy in a world that tries to steal it from us. Joy isn't a luxury. It's a necessity and I encourage you to find ways to find joy not just in the over-the-top bustle of the world, but in the everyday experiences of life. Just as Jesus was born for a specific time, place and purpose, *you were born for such a time as this.*

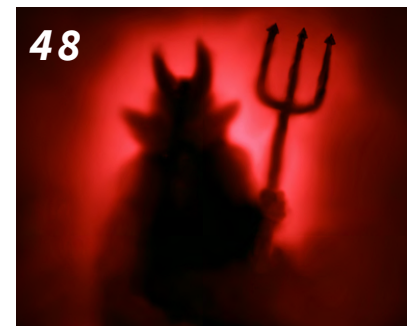
This year's Christmas magazine is filled with stories that we hope will inspire you to find opportunities where God can fill your cup to overflowing with unspeakable joy!

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Dave Sizemore".

Pastor

FR. DAVE SIZEMORE



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Living your dash

By Ben Lee

You were born to die... but you were also born to live. Your creation in this world is no less miraculous and divinely inspired than the creation of all of that surrounds you right now. In fact, statistically speaking, the odds are stacked against you simply being, let alone reading this article. The recency of world events and their local, personal impacts have led to a myriad of opportunities for introspection around the age-old question: what is the meaning of life? So, what do you do with this ... life, this against-all-odds existence that, for all intents and purposes, is a gift rather than a given? Every day we are presented with opportunities to focus on the core of our existence, that is to say: why we are here and what we are meant to do. Shall we dwell on the brevity, frozen with indecision or pacified with short term happiness? Or should we exalt virtue through self-sacrifice and charitable benevolence? We choose our path with every decision we make.

In eight short stanzas, Linda Ellis' 1996 poem, "The Dash" captures one's reflection about the meaning of the dash between one's birthdate and death date – essentially, one's life. It's reflecting on what's important in life—what has made up one's dash when the final dates are carved. *Are you a contributor, or just a consumer? Are you curmudgeonly or kind? Have you simply been served, or have you served others?* Though the poem is popular at funerals, its general theme is evergreen as it relates to the meaning of life and the fact that at any time, if your retrospective has left you wanting, you can course-correct. The fact that you are reading this now means that either by your grace or the grace of someone else's charity, St Francis has touched you and you've deemed this worth your time. It has become part of your dash. God's providence provides opportunities to touch hearts whenever possible through whatever means are accepted by those willing and able to simply listen. In large part, the Church emphasizes these opportunities through fraternity and charity. Good works and acts with pure intent enhance what God has already created—adding to others' experiences and helping them to attain the ends for which God placed them on this Earth. Similarly, for which God placed *you* on this Earth.

You were born to work and serve, but, working doesn't always have to mean toil and sweat, financial reward, and time spent away from loved ones. Work can carry with it an innate sense of prayer, devotion, and veneration to God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church—the book through which the vast majority of the beliefs of the Catholic Church are printed—references work very much in this same manner: "Work honors the Creator's gifts and talents received from him. It can also be redemptive... Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ," (CCC 2727). And while this passage might reference what some would call one's 'day job' it can also be interpreted as pertaining to acts of charity, either individually contributed or through organizations. In fact, Fr. Dave Sizemore's December 1 Flocknote address (the weekly email sent out by the Parish to ALL who desire a weekly update and messages of hope) he specifically references this, in that God doesn't always manifest in the form of fire or thunder and lightning (unless he's bowling in heaven, as my daughters like to say). He can be found in the gentle breezes of life. We can find God in each other—serving each other and others.

We are all born to be holy. "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. All are called to holiness," (CCC 2012). Holiness, as a dash, starts simply—as a dot. When starting a dash—any dash, whether you strike a stone or write it on paper, the moment the tool touches the medium—that single choice to start living—you make a dot, you make your

At the end of a life,
everyone has a dash...
YOU set the **boldness.**



mark. The more you love, the more you serve, the bolder your dash becomes. God is the hammer using you as the chisel. God is the wood and you are the lead. His pressure develops your potential. Your acceptance develops your dash. Your deep dash. Your meaningful dash. For we are all called to holiness; to embody the example of work and sacrifice set for us by the greatest carpenter—Jesus. “Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community,” (CCC 2728). We work and serve because of him. Acts of charity are innate to our human nature—man is good. Remember that the Saints were simple children, men and women, before they answered their call to fulfill the desires of the Holy Spirit. They trusted in God, they said “yes” to God and they were transformed. And so too you can be, if you say “yes” to what God is asking of you when provided the opportunity. Luckily, many of those around you have given of their time to offer such chances to ensure everyone has equal opportunity to their personal miracle of holiness.

If you’ve ever seen the 1988 movie, *Scrooged*, then you can probably recall at the end, Frank Cross’ soliloquy after an evening of Dickensian revelations: “There are people that are having... having trouble making their miracle happen. There are people that don't have enough to eat, or people that are cold. You can go out and say hello to these people. You can take an old blanket out of the closet and say "Here!", you can make them a sandwich and say "Oh, by the way, here! ...It's not just the poor and the hungry, it's everybody who's gotta have this miracle!” And while the specific context of this quote revolves around people simply being nice to each other, I contend that a miracle is unique each unto his own. What was Frank’s miracle? He woke up and took action.

Enter St. Francis and the dash of the Parish (because this Parish is 100% alive and thriving). Is the Holy Spirit calling

you to serve the poor? Talk to Shannon Walker about our Ministry of the Poor, or Debby Shelly about the Blessing Bags she helps to coordinate creating, or Deacon Eric Wright about the Golf Cart Ministry via the Street Evangelization that caters to the poor directly in the Newark community. Is the Holy Spirit laying on your heart to help families or children? Talk to Rita Adams about the Giving Tree and our partnership with the Salvation Army, or Kathy Ruff about Walking with Moms in Need or Shannon Walker about the Bicycle Ministry or Samaritan’s Purse. Is the Holy Spirit asking you to serve the Church

YOUR DASH IS MORE THAN JUST A DASH; IT’S YOUR TESTAMENT TO RECEIVING GOD’S GRACE.

and the Parish? Talk with Nancy Hoar about Grieving with Great Hope, or Carol Svatora about Women of St Francis group whose two-fold purpose is to unite all women of St Francis and provide help in the community and Parish where needed, or Camilla Egan about singing in 4 Hymn or The Upper Room where you learn how to tap into your God-given talents to build up the holy Church. I could go on and on... and I will: The Gift of Being Grand—Grandparent Ministry, Marriage Ministries, Respect

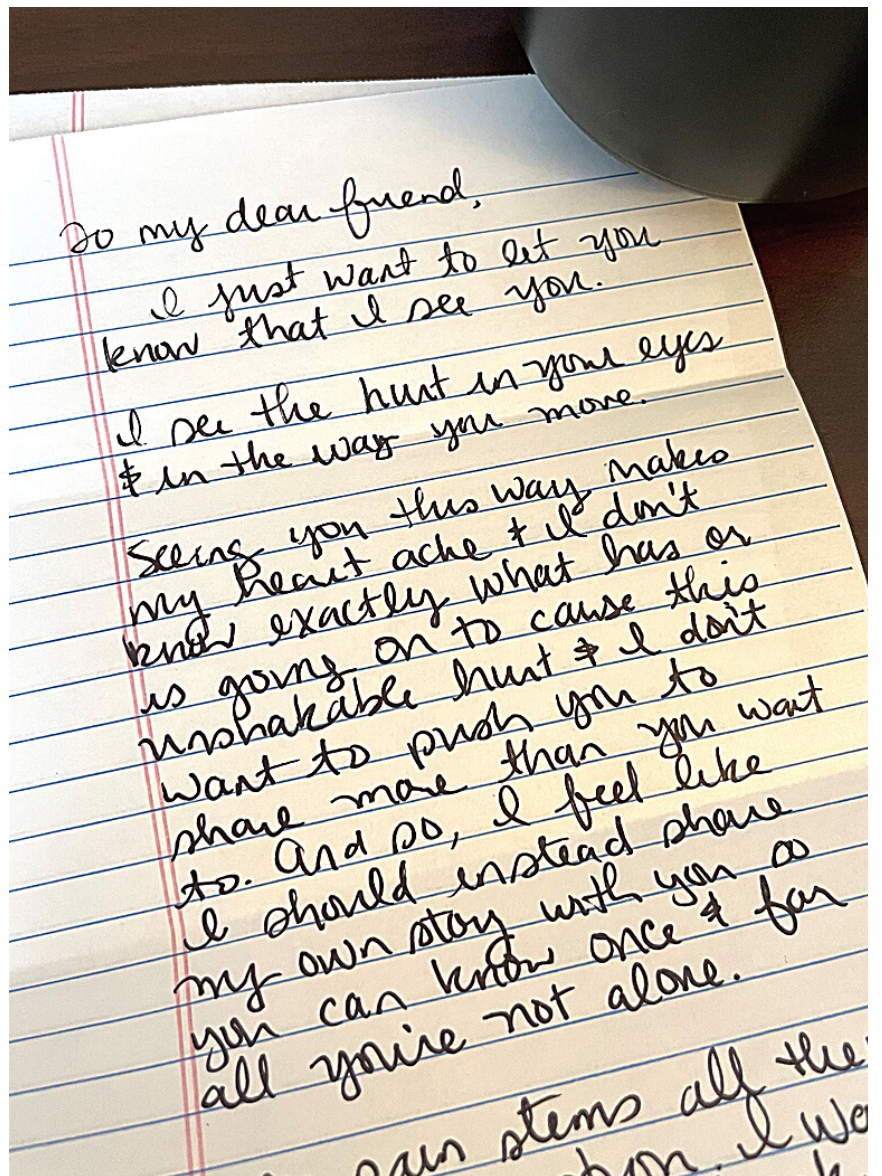
for Life, The Turban Project (free blessed headwear to those experiencing hair loss due to medical issues), Project Rachel (hope and healing to those in need after an abortion), Knights of Columbus Council #11665 (charitable Catholic men’s organization in service to God, family and neighbor), Men’s Vanguard and Soul Sisters (men’s and women’s leadership groups creating opportunities for faith and outreach), Homebound Ministries, Young Adult Ministries, Natural Family Planning ... I mean, honestly, am I over my word limit yet? And there are more not listed here! We are truly blessed as a Parish to have so many of these opportunities available to the community. Not every Parish has what we have. Go to stfrancisparish.net, click on Ministries & Organizations at the top and see the various Bible studies and other opportunities throughout the year to get involved, serve your neighbors, stay involved, and answer your call to holiness. You just have to say: “yes” to

what God is asking of you.

At the end of the day, at the end of a life, everyone has a dash, but YOU set the boldness. Yes, you were born to die, but you were also born to LIVE and LIVE for Him, live through Him, serving because of Him. Your dash is more than just a dash; it's your testament to receiving God's grace. It's your answer to the highest call, *your* sacrifice for *His* sacrifice. Your duty to engage. As Fr Mike Schmitz says in his podcast *The Bible In A Year*, "We are saved by grace, given freely, through faith (our response to God's gift), working itself out through love, knowing that we'll be judged on our actions." Is your dash a light scratch or a deep wedge? You might not be a mason, but if you're open to it, I know a certain carpenter who works pretty well with stone.

Open Letter to a Friend

Anonymous



Although man can... wisdom is witho... to praise yo... one of air... man, I... myself... yourse...
... human heart, because man is created... eases to draw man to himself. Only in... ess he never stops searching for:
... face that he is called to communion... With God is addressed to man as... sult is because God has created him... nes to hold him in existence. He... less he freely acknowledges that he...
... ways" of app... ture: the physic...
... day, men have... and behav...
... The world: start... its order and be... end of the un...
... of

THE CATECHISM IN A YEAR

WITH FR. MIKE SCHMITZ

Hallow

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Do you have a lingering hurt you can't seem to shake? Read the rest of the letter at stfrancisparrish.net/LetterToAFriend.

How will you make your dash?



Catholic Outreach Ministries, a ministry of St. Francis Parish shares the blessings of faith through assistance & actively alleviating human suffering through a variety of outreach programs. They would love to have you join the team - check out options below!



Assisting our community members with specific needs related to financial, material or spiritual crisis; through calls to our dispatch center.



Serving individuals in severe poverty, mostly homeless, and lacking all living necessities. Armed with the Holy Spirit, food, water, supplies and prayer.



Supplying free blessed headware to men, women, and children who experience hair loss due to a medical issue.



Providing community members in need with blessing bags complete with daily essentials.



Assesses, expands, and communicates resources to pregnant moms and families in need.



Find about more about these and other services offered by COM at www.com4us.life

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO DROP KICKING THE DEVIL

OUT OF YOUR HOUSE

Time for the one-two punch for
taking back your home for Jesus



“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.” This famous line is part of a monologue delivered by Roger "Verbal" Kint, played by Kevin Spacey in the movie *The Usual Suspects* (Bryan Singer, 1995) and it couldn't be a truer statement of the weaselly methodology used by the devil to keep us all at odds with one another. It's easy to forget that the *enemy is the enemy*. It's not you and not me, rather it is Satan's work that tears us apart. It's not enough for us to be wary of Satan's temptations when we're out and about; we need to stay vigilant at home too!

Lo and behold! The Catholic Church offers an arsenal of tools to ward off the devil, including holy water, the Rosary, confession, and communion and so much more. A new favorite tool for kicking Lucifer to the curb (not to mention for all the other fruits it bears) is the Enthronement to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Wait, don't turn the page! Those are just fancy words for making Jesus present in a physical way in your home through an image, prayer, and dedication ceremony.

Satan only has a foothold when we give it to him. Let us protect ourselves and our families and never allow him to

step inside our homes by giving Jesus a place of honor through an enthronement. Here's the skinny on how to complete a DIY enthronement:

1. **GET AN ENTHRONEMENT KIT** by visiting www.welcomehisheart.com (or dust off the one distributed in church back in October).
2. **CHOOSE A SUNDAY** for your enthronement ceremony and plan to attend Mass with your family and loved ones beforehand.
3. **SELECT A SACRED HEART IMAGE** and ask your priest to bless the image. Because there are so many variations of the image you're sure to find one to fit your specific artistic taste and decorative scheme. Pick what you love!
4. **ESTABLISH A PROMINENT PLACE** in your home (a mantel, or perhaps a side-table) where you will display the image. Consider placing pictures of family members and friends near the image.
5. **PREPARE YOUR HEARTS** beginning three days prior to the enthronement. Recite the prayers in the booklet.
6. **ENTHRONEMENT DAY** gather and complete the final prayer of consecration, giving Jesus the throne of authority in your house.



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Take your enthronement to the next level

Consider turning your enthronement into a series of “prayer parties.” Follow the steps from the article and add one or all of these:

Cast a Wider Net

Instead of only having immediate family present, consider inviting families and friends who share your values and maybe even those who have fallen away from the church. Or, how about those of different Christian backgrounds. It’s great to be able to introduce (or reintroduce) the beauty of our Catholic faith to others. Try this as a barometer for making an invite list: if there was a demon in my house, who would I call on to pray with me and for me?



Create Custom Prayer Cards

Snagging a digital version of our Sacred Heart image, create a custom prayer card online, print them out, and give them as favors to each guest. It is a nice touch that continues to remind them to keep praying for your family long after the enthronement.

To the Heart Through the Belly

From cakes and cookies to more savory veggie trays and chips with dip, there are countless Sacred Heart-themed foods on Google or Pinterest. Or, even more simply, pop items into a heart-shaped dish for a quick on-theme snack.



Love That Decor!

The easiest way to make an event special and add a little pizzazz is to add decorations. Fortunately, many Valentine’s day decorations can be repurposed for this event and using naturals like fresh flowers in red hues can add pops of color perfect for the occasion.





STILLE NACHT

The Christmas Truce of WWI

By Lauren Meier

World War I, known in its time as “The Great War,” was one of the most tragic events in our world’s history. Countries were pitted against each other in mass bloodshed, and the end result would be the death of 9.7 million soldiers and 10 million civilians. However, for one Christmas in 1914, there was peace on the battlefield.

It was around 8:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve when the scared young men making up the British forces overheard a familiar carol in German, “Silent Night” (in that language “Stille Nacht”). The British, cautious, would sing back “The First Noel.” Scouts were sent out into the middle of No Man’s Land, and the British returned with three things: whiskey, cigars, and a promise that if the British did not fire, neither would the Germans. A truce was made, and for several hours the young men, perhaps for the

very last time, got to act their age. Activities included putting up Christmas trees, exchanging conversations, and a game of “football” (soccer) that the Germans say they won 3-2. But the men knew that peace wouldn’t last, and the sentiment can be very well summed up in a quote by a friend of British soldier George Eade, he made in those few hours: “Today we have peace. Tomorrow, you fight for your country, I fight for mine. Good luck.”

For at least a day, men were united. There was no good side or bad side, no German or English, no black and white. There was simply a recognition of brotherhood and humanity. Germans knew that the English were also writing letters home to loved ones, and the English likewise knew that the Germans longed for the embrace of their mothers, too.

Do we not feel the same? Every day we go out into a divided society, but the opposition stands as a human too, created by the same God and offered salvation in the same act of love. So, I implore you, offer up your own equivalent of whiskey, cigars, and a cease-fire to someone today. A Christmas truce today could go a long way.

FAITH: CAUGHT NOT TAUGHT

By N. Jungers



At Youth Group there is something different every week. Some nights it's adoration; others we have talks, ranging in topics from the Trinity to Jesus' Kingship. One of my favorite ones was a Q&A session about our faith. I was able to bring up questions I had in a non-judgmental environment. The leaders are incredibly kind and open with us. They are always willing to help. They are the ones who show up every week to help us grow in our faith journey.

At Youth Group you'll find a group of excited teens, food, and the "Catholic Card Game" (no joke). From Martyr Mayhem to weekend retreats, it is truly a special place that has something for everyone. I encourage any teen to come, no matter where you are in your faith journey.

Growing in faith isn't a linear path; you will have your ups and downs. Sometimes you will do everything right and be all in, and some days you feel like God isn't listening, but what's important is you keep working at it. For me, attending Youth Group helps me grow in my faith.

Even though I've been raised Catholic and have been drilled with Catholic doctrine for my entire Catholic

school career, I never had a personal relationship with God, or even thought that it mattered. It seemed like something for extra holy people, people who were better about prayer than I was.

Then I attended Catholic Youth Summer Camp (CYSC). My time there blew my mind. College-aged men and women were fired up about the faith—it was incredibly inspiring. There was suddenly so much more. It was like I had unearthed a treasure box filled with golden coins. Suddenly the saints were easier to picture as real people, and their stories came alive. Worship and adoration were truly a life-changing experiences. The Catholic faith is absolutely beautiful, and my time at CYSC showed me that.

When I got home, I strived to be better. I worked to make time for prayer every day. Slowly it did get better, and as I was entering high school, I joined the Youth Group. It was refreshing to meet other teens who also were excited about their faith.

Elevate Middle and Summit High School Youth Groups meet on Sundays, 6 - 8pm. Visit stfrancisparish.net for more info.


A Quiet Conversation with a Superhero

By Ben Lee

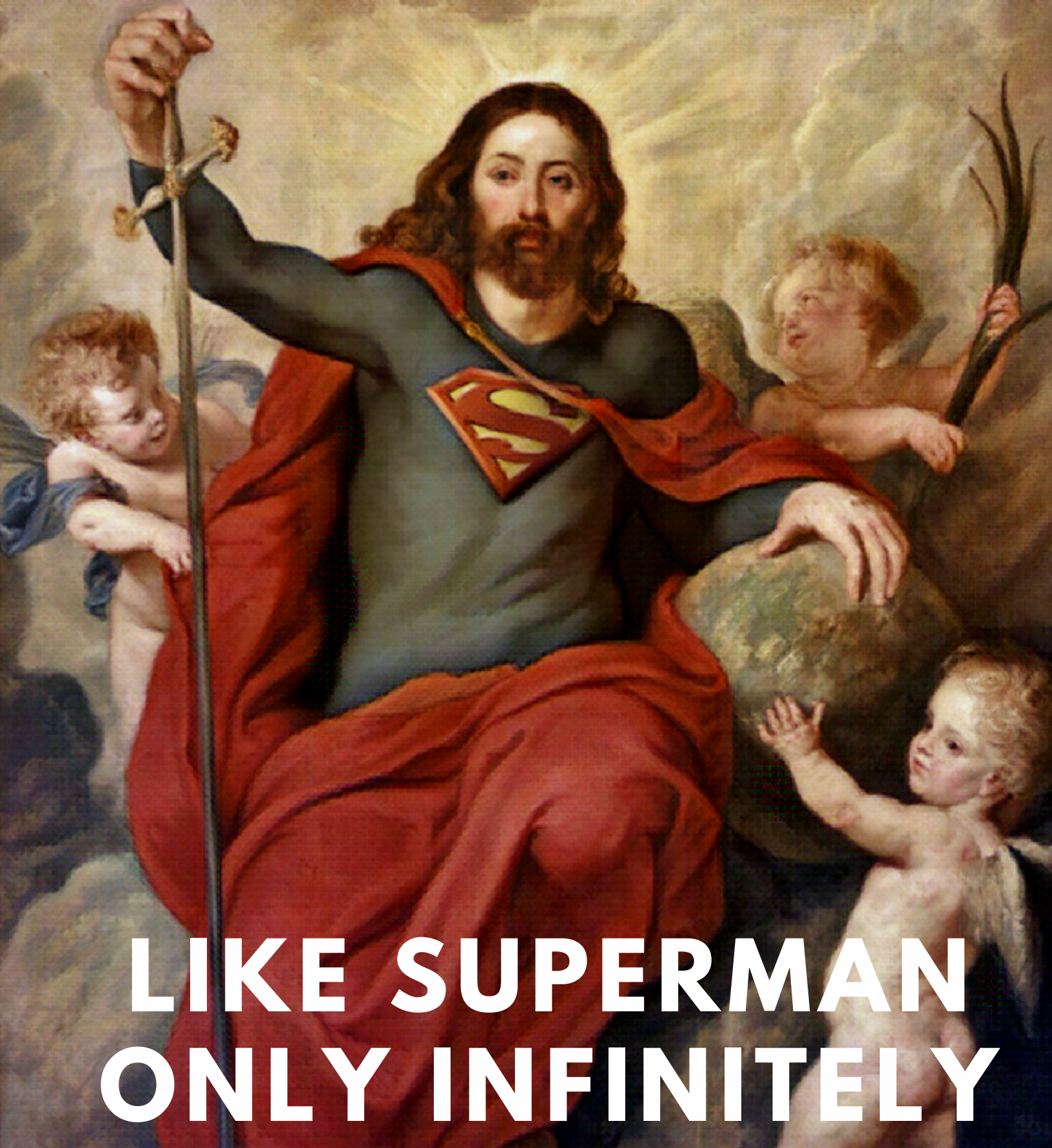
Imagine for a moment that you are walking into a small, intimate space about to come face-to-face with the most powerful being known to mankind. You sit and get excited—you can ask any question you want, no topic is off-limits. You take deep breaths to calm yourself. This is someone who can move mountains and emotions; who has raised up armies and laid waste to others; created worlds, healed suffering, and amassed a following of over a billion (not counting those with whom he now holds company). Today is a special day, this is a special place. It's quiet and reverent but inviting. This is a safe space, open to all conversations. No, I'm not talking about a conversation with a character from the Marvel universe. I'm talking about you and Jesus. I'm talking about adoration.

The Eucharist, Jesus himself, is the most important part of what we as Catholics celebrate during the Mass. The transforming of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus (the Transubstantiation) separates not only how we venerate Jesus's sacrifice during the Liturgy, but also during Eucharistic adoration – our Holy Hour. John 6:51 says, “I am the living bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of this World,” and, as such the Church



**WITHOUT
ADORATION
THERE IS NO
TRANSFIGURATION
OF THE WORLD.**
-Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger





**LIKE SUPERMAN
ONLY INFINITELY
MORE AMAZING**

has long recognized the importance of Eucharistic adoration. Take the tabernacle, for example. The Church requires its location to be in the “most worthy place with the greatest honor,” and that location “should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament,” (CCC 1183 & 1379). However, adoration isn’t only available outside of Mass; there is time immediately after receiving communion. However, that window is only open for as long as it takes to clean the altar before the closing benediction. Regular adoration provides us with the opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with Jesus, in his house, at your hour.

We are so incredibly blessed that St. Francis has had in place a program of daily Eucharistic adoration for more than 20 years, held during various hours, seven days a week, currently in the Annunciation Chapel, at the rear of the Church. While it is regularly attended by those signed up for specific hours, it is done so with the expectation that whoever wants to drop in, as their time permits, will have the ability. Jesus strives to be with us always and after his great sacrifice on Calvary, the Church recognizes his intent to find any way to our hearts, as we will accept him. “It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. Since Christ was about to take departure from his own visible form, he wanted to give us his sacramental presence... The Church and the World have a great need for Eucharistic worship...Let our adoration never cease.” (CCC 1380).

When my family and I returned to the Church, the thought of adoration was new to me. I had heard about it, but even going through Catholic schooling, it wasn’t a practice that stuck with me over time. Luckily, outside of the daily adoration, St Francis offers it to the Parish at

certain times during the year (along with Reconciliation) and we, as a family, attended. I was so moved by the grace, by the music, by the faithfulness of those in attendance, and the ability of a “regular Joe” to be in the presence of the Lord in that manner, that I signed up for a weekly 5 a.m. slot. After only a few weeks, I found myself leaving after my hour wanting more. The day before my timeslot, I would get excited. I began to feel fulfilled. I was nurturing and cultivating my newfound connection to Jesus. My spiritual life was transforming, and I was transforming. I was filling my cup.

What’s important to keep in mind, however, is that adoration is more than just a time offered with a front row seat to Jesus; it is a duty of veneration; of reverence; of great respect. “Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honored with the

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worship of adoration. “To visit the Blessed Sacrament is ... a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord.” (Paul VI, MF66)” (CC 1418) I was embracing a part of Catholicism to which I was minimally exposed in my younger life, but at that time, might have seen it as an obligation. I was now embracing adoration, for me. Choosing Jesus for me.

My biggest concern in starting this weekly commitment was not knowing how to pray. I think back to Luke 11:1 “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” So, I started with what I knew: The ‘Our Father’, ‘Hail Mary’ and the Rosary – and continued with what the Holy Spirit laid on my heart. This has become a weekly staple for my holy hour and what I’ve come to realize is that even though there isn’t a wrong way to adore, necessarily, silence is ‘virtuistic’ in that it allows what was previously unheard, to be heard.

Adoration provides a sacred silence to be filled with what the Church calls “contemplative prayer” and further defines it as, “...a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with who we know loves us.” (CCC 2709) Fr Mike Schmitz (of YouTube and podcast fame”) has quoted Pope Benedict XVI as saying, “God’s first language is silence,” and mentions often that it is in silence that God reveals himself to us as well as reveals us to ourselves. Silence can be uncomfortable at times, with our desire to fill it with anything, but it is so important to embrace this as a medium through which God’s voice speaks.

Silence is key to adoration, as it is to any two-sided conversation. Yes, two-sided. Because as much praying to God and internal reflection one might engage in during a silent hour, we must also listen to what God is telling us. In this way, Fr. Dave Sizemore forever

changed the way I view adoration, in that not only is adoration veneration by us to God, but also adoration of us by God. It truly is a dialogue... if you’re prepared to listen. The Church supports this, noting, “Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. “I look at him and he looks at me.” ... “His gaze purifies our heart.” (CC 2715) How wonderful it is to think that with the hour I have given to the Lord, he stands there the same, giving an hour to me. Both gazing at each other in awe of each other’s power and potential. Humbling to say the least.

It is with a profound sense of duty and honor that I enter the Chapel every week, knowing that I am not only there to venerate through contemplative prayer and the rosary, but to make amends for my sins, reflect on my week, and listen, silently listen, to what God is asking of me. I pray as often as I can, the prayer that Kimberly Hahn writes in Rome Sweet Home that her father asked her to pray every day: “Lord, I’ll go wherever you want me to go, do whatever you want me to do, say whatever you want me to say, and give away whatever you want me to give away.”

Adoration has changed my life. In making my hour a weekly routine, the practice has normalized prayer for me outside of the Mass. I got to the point where I was so disappointed when my hour was up that what I had once reserved for Sundays eventually became on demand any



day of the week. Now I multiply my time, making more holy time during the week, be it five minutes or an hour, utilizing the Hallow app to remind me of my daily commitments. I look forward to that prayer time, that reflection time, that time I set aside for me and Jesus wherever I am. The exception, now, is a day that goes by without some kind of prayer, some kind of veneration to Jesus through Scripture, the Rosary, or guided meditation. I certainly do not feel as if I pray as well as I want, but I continue to provide myself the opportunity to converse with my Lord because any conversation is a good conversation. My heart has become a Tabernacle; I just had to be open to receive Him.

After several months, I was eager to talk with others about my experience and how adoration had transformed my prayer life. I wanted to know what it had done for them. John Barbour, Deacon at St Edwards in Granville, has been attending adoration at St Francis since its inception. "I've been coming since it started with Don Blake and Sr Barbara, back in 2002," he said. "I ask 'Lord, what do You want me to do.' It was the impetus for me pursuing the Diaconate." This year he celebrates 10 years serving the Lord in that role. He asked, he listened, and he acted. "It's a personal visit with Christ Jesus. Quiet time. No distractions. Focused time. Quiet visitation." You cannot know what is being asked of you, until you listen."

Paula McWilliams, who has run St Francis' daily adoration for almost three years, calls it quite simply: Heaven on Earth. She says, for her, it's an extension of Mass and she attends to get guidance, comfort, and peace. "It's why I went back to Newark Catholic to sub[stitute teach]... you just have to be vulnerable enough to sit and listen. It opens you up to so much."

Jesus is real, Jesus is present, and either within the Tabernacle or the Monstrance (the sunburst vessel inside which the consecrated host is visibly displayed) we are afforded the opportunity to worship and to converse with our most Holy Lord. He's available in the Mass and outside of it, at any time of our choosing. Simply stated: Adoration provides us all with the opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with the real presence of Jesus, in *his* house, at *your* hour. In choosing *my* holy hour, adoration changed my life, and I can only pray that you choose to provide yourself with the same opportunity. God Bless.

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Men on Fire

w/ Bart Schuchts

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Live into the life God
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1/20

6:30 - 9pm

&

1/21

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Mary ~~MERRY~~ CHRISTMAS

By Crystal Stamper

Every year, our family, like so many families worldwide, eagerly await all the glad tidings of the grand holiday. We listen to all the classic songs, bake a gingerbread house, decorate the mantel and tree, and feast on all the holiday foods! We partake in several traditions like hanging a pickle on our tree, hosting the elf on the shelf, and of course, lighting the advent candles. Of the greatest traditions, we always have a nativity scene. I carefully place out the figurines, the shepherds, and sheep – even a sheepdog, the kings and camels, and the shelter (inn) with Joseph and Mary, keeping back the manger and Jesus until Christmas Eve. This is my favorite holiday custom as I think of our savior being born, knowing that “Jesus is the reason for the season.”

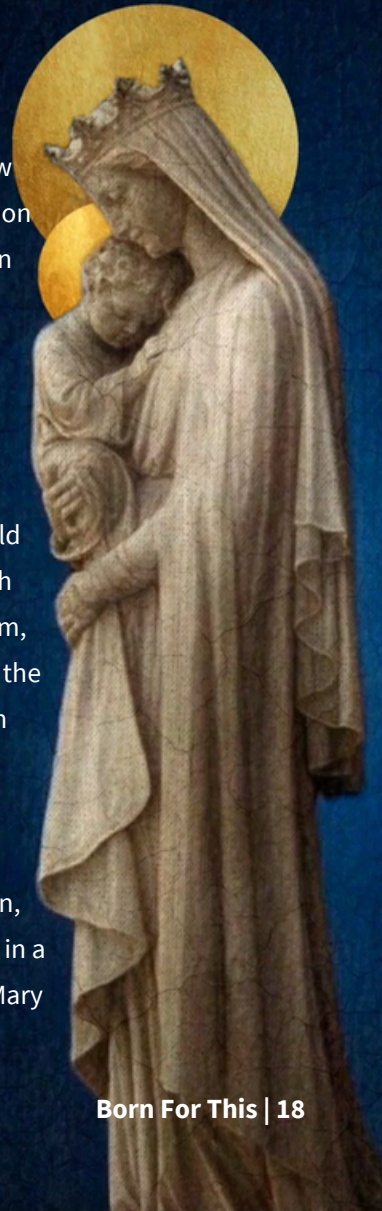
Is it though? Is it really, only, because of Jesus? Coming from a non-Catholic background, I had been satisfied with stopping there. After all, it is nothing but the blood of Jesus that saves, right?

One year ago, I found myself visiting St. Francis Church, not yet knowing anyone. I was sitting in front of Mary, having never prayed to her before; I felt a pull to just converse with her. And I did.

Gazing at her beauty with a great sigh, I spoke, “from one mother to another, I need your help, Mary...” And with that my whole life has been significantly blessed: a new church, new job, new school, renewed faith life, renewed marriage, and renewed self. I know it is the great intercession of Mary that has brought me closer to the goodness of God. Therefore, I have felt it placed upon my heart to “give” back to Mary. In doing this, I have decided to consecrate my heart to Jesus through Mary, and the end date shall match the one year since I prayed to her. This is most definitely a divine movement as the Holy Spirit aligned the dates.

This Christmas I have a new perspective. Becoming Catholic, it is now on my heart to “know” Mary more. In my searching and learning of Mother Mary, I have come to realize Christmas could not happen without her! It is because she said “yes” to the angel Gabriel that our Christian faith was ever even set in motion. It was she who carried him, birthed him, raised him, prayed for him, watched over him, led him, cheered for him, taught him, and indeed, was with him all through the crucifixion and after. How is it, that all my life, I have only ever thought of her as “just” his mom and not according to the great significance she should be afforded?

Therefore, it is my duty to place her upon my mantel with grandeur and thoughtfulness. To recognize her and cherish her as the Mother of all Mothers, Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, the One who says “yes,” the Blessed Virgin Mary. To honor her as Saint Mary and indeed, share in a “M-a-r-y Christmas.” I wish all the rest of our faith family of St. Francis de Sales Parish a very “Mary Christmas” as well.



Christmas comes only once a year but we want to see you more often.

We literally have something for every age group and every interest! Bring your hearts, bring your friends to visit this us in the new year! Call the parish office (740.345.9874) or visit stfrancispark.net for details!



Youth Ministry Kick Off Party

Sunday, 1/8 | 7pm
Middle/high schoolers start the new year off at the trampoline park.



Abide for Young Adult Men

Tuesdays beginning 1/3 | 6:30pm
An opportunity for men (age 18 - 30ish) to form faithful friendships and have fun!



Walking With Purpose

Mondays beginning 1/9 | 6:30pm
Tuesdays beginning 1/10 | 9:15am
Girlfriends and their bibles - let's go!



Abide for Young Adult Women

Wednesdays beginning 1/4 | 6:30pm
An opportunity for women (age 18 - 30ish) to form faithful friendships and have fun!



Outdoor Adventures Ministry Hike

2nd Saturday of the month (1/14) | 10am
For all ages, gather to enjoy nature and make new friends.



Gift of Being Grand

1st & 3rd Thursdays each month | 10am
Grandparents get tools to minister to their children/grandchildren.



Alpha Marriage

Saturdays beginning 1/14 | 6pm
Back by popular demand! Dinner and a movie; free childcare is available!



Dead Theologians Society

1st Wednesdays of the month (1/4) | 7:15pm
High schoolers, meet saint-celebs and find your path to holiness.



The Rescue Project

Sundays beginning 1/15 | 5:30pm
A compelling experience of the gospel with food, conversation and prayer.



That Man is You

Saturdays beginning 1/7 | 7:30am
Donuts, coffee, and chats about how best to lead your family to heaven.



Men on Fire Retreat

Saturday, 1/20 | 7-9pm
Sunday, 1/21 | 8am - 4pm
Be who God made you to be!



Seeds of Faith

Sundays beginning 1/8 | 9:45am
For busy adults, this scripture study is great for those hungry to learn more!



Adults Seeking Knowledge

Tuesday, 1/24 | 6:30pm
ASK Fr. Dave anything! This time with guests Matt Munhall & Molly Loy.



Soul Sisters Gathering

Sunday, 1/8 | 12:15pm
Lunch and inspiration are on the agenda with guests from AM820's *The Visitation*.



Surviving Divorce

Sundays beginning 1/29 | 9:45am
Hope, healing and clarity about divorce and annulments and the Church.



The Light Within You

By Jason Kotecki

I had a bully in middle school. His name was John B. (I'm withholding his last name because I am sure he matured into a nice man with great kids and has started a charity to feed homeless cats.) But he was a jerk back then.

He looked like a swollen eggplant with hair. A year older than me, John B. never punched me or beat me up. He never separated me from my lunch money. No, John was an orator, preferring to use his words to belittle and humiliate me.

It all began when we had to draw our shoes in art class and the teacher hung our work in the hallway. Now my brothers and I weren't lacking anything we needed, but our family didn't have the money for name-brand shoes. Nikes were a pipe dream, so I had to settle for Nucleus high tops instead. (In case you're wondering that company no longer exists, so bullies now have to focus their attention elsewhere.) Ironically, I thought they were pretty rad, discount store origins aside.

John B. didn't.

Every day between classes, he'd point me out and belittle me for my off-brand shoes. I wanted to punch him in his smug, fat face. Considering he was much larger than me, that wouldn't have ended well. So I was left to endure the stomach-churning mockery and shame until a new art project made its way to the wall.

It could have been worse. It's small potatoes in the grand scheme of things. But whoever said "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me" is a dolt with oatmeal for brains. Of course words hurt! And sometimes they have longer-lasting effects, with the emotional scars remaining long after any broken bones have healed.

One day in my more recent past, I was watching the deer in my backyard and I thought about Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, another victim of bullying. I wondered what he might look like in real life, if his nose really did light up and wasn't just some silly illuminated cartoon clown nose. My brain is a weird place, but it's the question that inspired the painting above.

It also led to a very powerful experience.

As the piece progressed, it took on a life of its own. The deer's piercing eyes grabbed me and wouldn't let go. They were vulnerable, revealing someone who was sad, hurt, and alone. Someone who maybe wondered why he was made broken. And someone totally unaware that the source of ridicule, the very thing he wished he could be rid of, was actually a gift.

I thought back to my run-in with John B. I remembered the anxiety I felt each day, hoping to not cross paths with him in the hall, resentful that my parents weren't well-to-do enough to afford Nikes.

Looking back now, find it notable that John B.'s criticism was about the brand of shoes, and not the effectiveness of the drawing. The drawing was really good. His taunting certainly didn't cause me to feel pride in my talent, but perhaps he was jealous. After all, a poorly drawn nondescript shoe hardly would have garnered as much attention.

I get that now. But not then. Back then, I wanted to blend into the shadows and disappear. Sometimes the darkness is inviting because it promises to keep you hidden from the scorn, the sticks, the stones, and the fists. But embracing the darkness isn't the answer.

It turns out that the one thing you can't escape in the shadows is yourself. And can I be honest with you? John B. was a jerk. But he's not the biggest, meanest, most terrible bully I've ever faced. Not by a long shot. That title goes to me.

I've said worse things about myself than John B. ever did. I've been told that I am the worst husband, son, father, and friend...by myself. I've been reliably informed that I'm not smart enough, brave enough, or talented enough by someone who should probably know: me.

Why are we so willing to treat ourselves more horribly than we'd ever treat another person? Our inner bully criticizes our every move, never giving the benefit of doubt. It showers us with the most vile, hurtful, poisonous self-talk. It accompanies our days with a drumbeat of doom, a never-ending echo that we have nothing to offer and we'll never be enough. It counters every morsel of virtue with a mountain of evidence proving that we suck. Then someone like John B. comes along and merely confirms what you already believed about yourself all along.

As I was working on this painting, I could almost feel my heart breaking for little

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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.

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



Crafting Your Glory Story

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

the RESCUE project

What is it? Simply put, an experience of the gospel surrounded by food, conversation and prayer.

In videos starring by Fr. John Riccardo, the Rescue Project seeks to proclaim the gospel in a compelling and attractive way over eight weeks in a small group format. This experience is imbued with beauty, authentic humanity, and accompaniment.

Why rescue? We passionately believe that the most urgent task is the compelling proclamation of the gospel, one that not only shares it in an attractive – and concentrated – way, but that also offers people a way of seeing reality, and of making sense of the world, history, and life that is vastly different from the story our modern culture tells.

Until this happens, the Christian faith is often experienced as a mere set of rules and disciplines, and simply going to Church isn't likely to lead a person to embark on the great adventure that is following Jesus and continuing His mission of the rescuing of this world.

We don't think most people have ever heard the gospel.

Who's it for? The Rescue Project is for anyone and everyone! It appeals to those who have been walking with Jesus for years, as well as those for whom Jesus is only a figure in ancient history. Our parish hosted the inaugural run of The Rescue Project in the fall, and we're geared up to offer in the New Year both at the parish and in homes.

Oh, and by the way it's free!



Next session at St. Francis

Sunday evenings, 5:30 - 8pm

1/15 - 3/5/2023

Dinner | Movie | Discussion

Extended Day Retreat on Sunday, 2/26, 12:30 - 5pm

Get info and register at stfrancisparish.net/TRP

LUCY

I want to share how the Lord revealed himself to me. I have always been active in the church, and I have a heart to serve. My relationship with the Lord I felt was always strong and I understood that he loved me and died for me. I had a desire to grow deeper in relationship with the Lord and I realized so much more about his love for me.

I heard about the Rescue Project and thought it would be an interesting experience. I never imagined the impact that it would have on me. Thinking that it was for rescuing others and being a tool for evangelizing. I found out that I too was in need of rescuing and that God was opening up my eyes and my heart to a deeper love and understanding. He helped me to see in a new way the love that he has for me. It was a more profound understanding of the love from the cross, it was for me a personal sacrifice and love just for me. Father Riccardo described Jesus as an “ambush predator” who chose to be on the cross to specifically go hunting for the enemy and defeat him for my sake. He was not the hunted, but the hunter, not the victim but the victor.

The Rescue Project changed my relationship in so many ways with the Lord. I have a different feeling when I walk into the church, my feelings of love, gratitude, and understanding have grown. My heart is open to more love from him and also to give to others so much so that I want to host the Rescue Project in my home and tell everyone about the love Jesus has for them.

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"The single most impactful 45 minutes of my life."

"I recommend tissues and a seatbelt."

MARY BETH

I would like to share how God has brought me back home, back to church. There were a variety of moments and people who together God used to open my mind and my heart to the Holy Spirit (along with many years of my mom's prayers for it to happen!).

I was very active in the church before my divorce in 2011, but after the divorce I fell away from the church. After a few failed relationships and job changes, I felt hopeless. Worry overcame my body and mind. I couldn't do it alone anymore.

Last Christmas, after attending Christmas Eve Mass, I felt like I needed to be back, this place (St. Francis) is comforting, joyful, beautiful, peaceful and HOME! This past year I have been attending weekly Mass and adoration. Adoration is the best part of my week!

I was blessed with the chance to attend the Rescue Project which was an amazing journey of faith. The fellowship of other parishioners gives me the strength to continue this journey. I am not alone. Fr. Ricardo presented the Good News of Jesus in a compelling way that has led me into a deeper relationship with Him.

After the Rescue Project Retreat, I feel so empowered to be able to put all of my trust and faith in God. My anxieties don't consume me anymore, my complete trust in the Lord has allowed me to praise Him every single day for all that I have been blessed with, even the bad days!

I want to share my journey and help others find their way back to the place where I call home. It's the most peaceful, joyous place to be.

"Christ Jesus our Lord was very kind to me. He has greatly blessed my life with faith and love just like his own." 1 Timothy 1:14

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Rudolph, as if I wanted to assure him that he is awesome. I wanted to beg him to pay those bullies no mind. I wanted to remind him that the thing that makes him stand out – the very thing others mock him for – is his gift to share with the world.

Eventually, I realized Rudolph in this painting was me. And he is you. Like Rudolph, there is a light within you. It might be hidden in your pain, your brokenness, or the thing that makes you weird. It pulses when you share it for the good of another and brighten someone's day. Like Rudolph, you are different. That's exactly what makes you a wonderfully made, extraordinary work of art.

You see, darkness doesn't hide the truth. It uses just enough of it to get you to believe the lies. Yes, it IS true that you aren't enough. The lie is that you need to be.

Like Rudolph, we just need you to share your light with the rest of us.

Jason Kotecki is the Chief Creative Guy and co-founder of Escape Adulthood and delivers the speaking programs, makes the pretty pictures, does a bunch of the writing, and oversees the design and overall direction of this ship. Find him online at www.EscapeAdulthood.com.

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOLERS

YOUTH MINISTRY

Sundays
6 - 8pm



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MERRY CHRISTMAS

FREE Premium Membership through Easter 2023

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