

FMA FOCUS

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Franciscan Mission Associates
Mt. Vernon, N.Y. 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Virtue: JOY

"Joy to the world... the Lord has come!" These eight simple words of a favorite hymn ignite radiant faces throughout our churches on Christmas Eve.

Yet, just as the angels proclaimed "JOY" to a waiting world over 2000 years ago, how much more is this fruit of the Holy Spirit and hallmark of Christian life needed today.

It goes without saying that many of the world's people still listen for that angelic message of Joy first exploded over a cold Bethlehem sky.

Today we must give thanks for thousands of people freed up in recent centuries from the bondage of evil and oppression.

Harder still, is pondering the millions still awaiting Good News. And knowing how much they await the Good News of Salvation.

Pray for the gift of joy this Christmas season, especially for those still awaiting its dawning in their lives. "Joy... Let earth receive her king!" ■

O Lord, help us look out the window

Nearly all of us get out of the house at some time during the Christmas season: with shopping, church-going, making time for visiting. We see Christmas, from the beginning of Advent and certainly through Epiphany as a joyous season. Getting out and about is a goal. Share the joy!

In fact, getting out, for almost anything these days, is quite unusual. The times and the economy alone find most people begging for longer days.

Today, two or three jobs for parents outside the home are common, often with parents working different shifts. Then, there are worries about continuing education for adults, higher education for children, career and family health, proper exercise, being green, being civic and civil. Enjoying "quality time."

At Christmas we celebrate once again the miracle of Christ's birth



into human life and time. We reverence the mystery of Salvation for our own world today ... and the world we are making possible for our children, our grandchildren and all those who will live after us.

From a religious standpoint, the frantic pace we live today becomes something almost pagan in scope. We need a conscious effort to put the brakes on. And when, better than the dawning of Advent to do so?

It's almost in the air, as the days of November close out and move into Advent, with age old songs from Christmas past sprouting in our hearts and heads:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel...*

The refrain of an ancient hymn chanted in Latin even in the 13th century world of St. Francis of Assisi, draws on roots thousands of years still older. Reaching back to the many titles showered on the much-hoped-for Messiah - and chanted by people long gone, prophets, sages and those whose names we will never know.

With hymns stirring our memories, perhaps we need to go to the windows of our homes and look outside. See the world as it is today. Try to understand how we are called by our baptism and love of Jesus to help make this a better world. For most of us, it will be actions small in scope. Every parish has a list of needs, just waiting for volunteers: Cards and notes to be written (something even many shut-in's can do), people to be visited, mail-

ings to be prepared, repairs needed, volunteers to inspire and chaperone youth groups... a host of needs.

Including participation in ministries. Always needed, year-round: religious educators, eucharistic ministers (especially for outreach to the sick), lectors, altar servers, choir members and musicians.

Remember, when we are dismissed from Mass, we are sent out into the world, to bring the presence of Christ and His Kingdom with us. In that way, you may be inspired to work as a volunteer ambulance driver or firefighter.

However the Holy Spirit inspires you, whatever choice you make - go to it! Guaranteed: your time, your gift of love for Jesus may have far reaching effects, some of which you may never see recognized in this world.

But for certain, you will be making this a better world for Christ to come into, every day, not just during the Christmas season. In the Lord's service, you become the comforting words of Christ, the Lord's warm hug, the Lord's laughter and gift of joy. You become a reminder of the Salvation and all the joy that his long-awaited birth brought to this world - in His time on earth, and ours.

Isn't that why we're here? And isn't that what Christmas is really all about? ■

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Christmas in Eastern Europe

The resurgence of religion and the life of faith among so many nations of Eastern Europe since the fall of Communism has been amazing. Some call it a miracle.

Likewise, the tenacity of so many people who held on to their faith, not only under communist domination in the 20th Century. But faith that stood firm, through persecutions by czars, kings, and tyrants going back many hundreds of years.

Often Christmas news stories spotlight one or more of the Catholic Christian churches in Eastern Europe, many of them of the Byzantine tradition, and described as one of the Eastern Rites.

Most of us in the western world grew up in the Latin or Roman Rite of the Church.

Today, however, you may have friends and neighbors of Eastern European heritage, families who faithfully keep to their Eastern Rite religious heritage. They may be any one of the five major families of Eastern Catholic Rites:

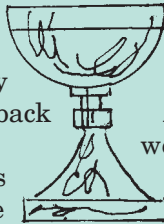
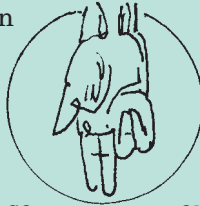
Byzantine (the largest with Greek and Russian languages).

Alexandrian or Coptic (Egyptian).

Antiochene (or Syrian).

Chaldean (from the early Church in present-day Iran and Iraq).

Armenian (Armenia was the first nation to convert as a whole to Christianity).



Many Eastern Catholics adhere to the Julian Calendar, rather than our western calendar, with a major celebration on January 7. Gift-giving for children is usually celebrated on the Feast of St. Nicholas, in the Eastern calendar, December 19.

Others here in the western world have moved the gift-giving to the western Christmas (December 25).

And while their cousins in the western churches are busy shopping, wrapping, and juggling invitations to various holiday parties, Eastern Christians are taking part in a 40-day fast that precedes Christmas.

Children are central to the dawning of Christmas (January 7), beginning on Christmas Eve, as Ukrainian Catholics of the Eastern Rite observe it. When children spot the first star in the night sky, the festivities begin. A lavish and ceremonial meal closes this long period of penance and fasting. It is a meatless meal (fish is allowed), featuring traditional vegetable dishes and pastries. And on this night, the festive meal must wrap up in time for everyone to attend Midnight Mass (Liturgy).

The next day, another lavish family meal—with no menu offerings barred—follows morning Divine Liturgy. Again, extended family and friends enjoy hospitality as well as a great Feast Day dinner.

Christmas liturgy, with an Eastern perspective. ■

THE UNCHURCHED STILL WAITING FOR THE WORD

The day was November 29, 1970, 38 years ago, when Pope Paul VI preached a homily urging all Christians to “proclaim Christ to the whole world.” Pope Paul chose these waning days of November and the Church year itself to give two clear reminders:

1) Time is always short in matters of preaching the Gospel, NOW—before life and time run out in this world.

2) Christ calls every baptized Christian to take up the primary mission of the Church — evangelization. Bringing the gospel to all people.

“As Christians, you share his name,” Pope Paul VI reminds us. “He has already made most of you his own.”

Basic to faith and to sharing that faith is this fact: “Jesus is Christ, the Son of the living God. Because of Him, we come to know the God we cannot see... We also know that He will be the complete fulfillment of our lives and our great happiness for all eternity.”

So much does this message reflect the teaching of Christ that this homily is now incorporated into The Liturgy of the Hours (Office of Readings), the liturgical prayer of the Church worldwide.

As we approach Advent and Christmas, could there be a better time to examine our call to evangelize - and

how best to go about? This mission is something we Catholics need to learn more about.

In the United States alone, there are over 80 million people who have no church affiliation of any kind.

Some “unchurched” may well be members of our own families, our neighbors, and friends. All good people, beloved of God, yes. But people who likely had little or no religious education. In many cases, they lacked any example of faith lived out in daily life at home.

In our nation, this is a time for evangelization.

As we listen to the Advent readings, hear also the echo of thousands of people in Jesus times. The people who were not Jews, growing up on the stories of God’s promise of a redeemer. People who were likely much like our own ancestors. They would never have heard about God, had it not been for the Apostles and disciples, swallowing their fears, and obeying the Lord. Getting out in the world to bring the Gospel to others.

We must always turn to God in prayer, first. Surely for the grace to know our own role in evangelization, as well as to pray for those who may be searching for God, even unaware.

It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens hearts. Pray that your prayers may have a role in opening the unchurched to the Living God in their very midst. ■

A SPIRITUAL CHRISTMAS GIFT

If you wish to give a spiritual gift for your loved ones or for special friends at Christmas, may we suggest a gift enrollment in Franciscan Mission Associates.

Those you enroll at Christmas will share spiritually in the Masses and prayers of all our Franciscan friars during 2009 and in a Solemn Novena of Masses to begin on Christmas Day.

You will receive beautifully engraved Christmas gift cards, well in advance. Each card is designed to show your name as the donor and the name of each person you decide to enroll. You may remit or give the gift announcements as you choose.

To obtain additional Christmas enrollment cards, please write today to:

Fr. Robert, O.F.M., Box 598, Dept. 281, Mount Vernon, NY 10551

The Feast of St. Nicholas, Bishop

December 6 is celebrated as the Feast Day of St. Nicholas, a Fourth Century Bishop born in what is now Turkey. Even in his own times, and without modern communications, Nicholas grew famous in his homeland as a holy man dedicated to serving God's poor and abandoned.

His diocese was Myra, described by historians as "run down." His flock lived scattered over the area's mountains and arid valleys, a region that knew both bitter cold and searing heat. Nicholas visited his people, at least annually, usually bearing gifts: blankets for the elderly in winter and in any season, toys for the children. His only transportation for these pastoral visits proved to be his healthy stride on strong feet. In bad weather, he traveled via donkey, no doubt the better to carry sacks filled with gifts for the needy.

Nicholas also worked tirelessly on behalf of prisoners, even arguing successfully before magistrates to pardon prisoners condemned to execution. His prayerful concern for sailors, in an area famous for fierce storms and lost ships, led to his being hailed in modern times as patron of sailors.

Nicholas is most renowned for secretly dropping off a bag of gold to poor families of young poor women in need of a dowry. Such girls, much like those in many nations today, would be left to lives on the street, without such a gift.

Nicholas lived in dangerous and turbulent times, a period of persecution that found some half a million

Christian men, women and children sent to slaughter by the Emperor Diocletian. He imprisoned Bishop Nicholas as well, and likely planned to add him to the list of Christian dead. A miracle of history intervened: the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

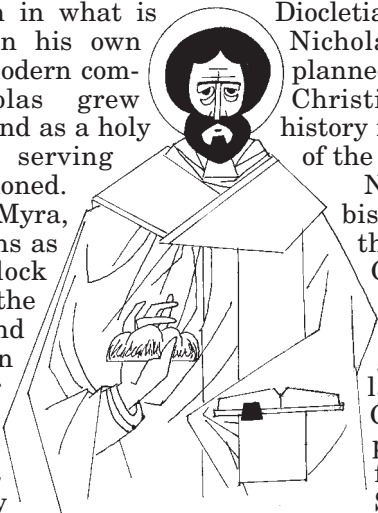
Nicholas was among 300 bishops who gathered for the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, a meeting encouraged by Constantine. It was this great Council that formulated the definitive Christian Creed which we pray in largely the same format, at Mass each Sunday.

After his death in 350 AD, people began to imitate Nicholas' life and charity. Hence, the custom of gifts for children at Christmas began early.

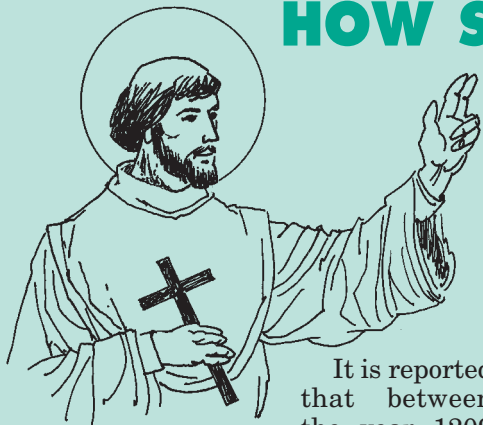
Likewise, the great saint's concern for poor women has been inspirational to the Church throughout the ages, particularly in care and concern for pregnant and unwed women.

We see that core belief developed into historic homes for unwed mothers, established by dioceses and religious communities of women. Likewise, hospitals and orphanages. And in modern times, along with schools to educate women, the Church has developed extensive services for women, families and children, through its Catholic Charities system.

Every year on the Feast of St. Nicholas, we honor this Saint's living legacy. In the opening prayer of the Mass, we pray: "...by the help of St. Nicholas keep us safe from all danger, and guide us on the way of salvation." ■



HOW ST. FRANCIS BUILT VOCATIONS



It is reported that between the year 1209 when St. Francis robed the first group of followers, and the year of his death in 1226, friars of the new Franciscan Order could be found at the furthest reaches of the world: Western Europe as far as Portugal, to England, then to the Scandinavian areas, and into present day Poland and the Balkan states. Beyond that, Franciscans could be found in the Middle East, and even near present day India.

It was a remarkable expansion in just 15 years, for a new Order demanding an austere vocation of prayer, poverty, and preaching. The big attraction: Friar Francis, living as he believed God asked him to.

Today, however, the Church is no longer the dominant influence in society. So vocation recruitment needs to be more aggressive. Our vocation directors for priesthood and religious life talk about “campaigns” to attract suitable vocations.

Also, the recruiters can no longer be confined to priests and religious. For vocations come from among God’s people, suitable men and women in our families, our parishes, our schools and universities, our businesses.

So, who keeps an eye out for suitable vocation: You do.

The key: Keeping priestly or

religious vocation as a distinct calling and choice for young people. Let the young men or women know you will pray, because you see outstanding qualifications in their manner of living, working, and being “Christ” for others.

Today it is not uncommon to see young men in their final years of college serving an “internship” of sorts in our parishes. Often destined for a major seminary after graduation, they reside in the parish on weekends, and gain experience in various ministries and services: cantoring, visiting shut-ins, serving as lectors and eucharistic ministers. Taking the opportunity for prayer with the pastor, and with parishioners, deepens the dimension of that internship and the support the candidate may experience.

Simply being available to parishioners and young people will be positive fall-out for a young man considering the priesthood.

Here are the two positive steps in promoting vocations: Prayer and Support.

We need to be supportive of our priests and religious already vowed and consecrated. Pray for them, and let them know it.

Secondly, speak up whenever the pastor or religious makes a difference by action or example. Just a few kind words or an occasional old-fashioned thank you note can do much to offer both emotional and spiritual support.

What better time to do so than at Christmas, even with a Christmas note in your own handwriting. Thankfulness is a virtue and the most appreciated gift. ■

Director's Letter

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

FRANCISCAN FRIARS/P.O. BOX 598/MOUNT VERNON, N.Y. 10551-0598

TEL. AREA CODE: 914 664-5604



Dear Friend,

It is hard, isn't it, to make much of Advent. A time of waiting becomes a time of hustle and bustle as hundreds of voices on television and radio scream CHRISTMAS in our ears.

You can't put on blinders to shield your eyes; wear sound-proof earmuffs to stop your ears; you and I live in this bustling, busy world. Children and grandchildren, (and for us Friars, young novices) so new to the world, want us to tell them of the journey ahead.

What will high school bring? What will marriage bring? What will first vows bring? And right now: What will Christmas bring?

Waiting and anticipation are important parts of all our lives. Although we live in the present, the future is always in view.

For the Christian the years revolve around the Gospel story of sin and forgiveness; sorrow and redemption; joy and gladness. And Advent in its turn is just as important as Christmas.

Right now, you and I are in the Advent of life. We listen and pray; we work and study; we hope and await the final coming of Jesus. This is an important time for us.

So make the most of this Advent. Pray one more prayer. Spend five more minutes each day in silence. Sacrifice something each day. Nothing stupendous is needed. Like our lives, Advent is ordinary, but important and not to be hustled away.

God's choicest blessings on you and yours,
Merry Christmas

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Robert, ofm".

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

REBUILDING BODIES AND HEARTS IN ANTIGUA

Over the centuries the example of St. Francis has encouraged others to follow in his footsteps to help the poor.

At one end of the square in the ancient city of Antigua, Guatemala, a city founded in 1543, is the Franciscan Hospital rebuilt after the devastating 1976 earthquake. The Hospital and Church take up a city block close to the centre of Antigua. This old colonial building has a history that goes back almost four hundred years.

The friar who began these works, Hermano Pedro, was canonized a saint—St. Pedro de San Jose Betancur—in 2002 by Pope John Paul II. Born in the Canary Island he arrived in Central America as a young man, convinced that his calling was to spread the Gospel in the New World.

A man of deep prayer, he came to Guatemala in 1651 and began working among the most disadvantaged of the capital, the poor, the imprisoned, the slaves and the sick. He was known as the “St. Francis of the American” by the time he died of pneumonia at age 41. He founded Antigua’s first hospital in a small thatched hut.

Here at the hospital, under the direction of Fr. Jose of the Central American province, the works of “Hermano Pedro” continue. With the generous help of Franciscan Mission Associates, our province has been able to help this great work many times.

The hospital is a remarkable refuge for the poor of this ancient city. Both young and old receive care here. Most remarkable is the work of volunteers who come to spend days working with the little children, the chronically ill, handicapped or the old people who otherwise would be left to die on the streets. Approximately five hundred beds (including cribs) is routinely a perma-



ment home to over four hundred people ranging in age from just a few days to over ninety years. Most who live at Hermano Pedro have chronic disorders such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, mental retardation, Alzheimer's disease, polio paralysis, deafness and blindness, and senile dementia.

When last we visited, the hallway outside the dispensary was crowded with mothers and children. In the courtyard the mentally challenged sat in their special world, knowing that God loves them and sends His missionaries to care for their needs.

Our ways are not God's ways, and while we cannot understand these tragedies, through modern medicine we are attempting to find out. Volunteer doctors perform surgery to assist those with various maladies. Generous volunteers and teachers accept the challenge of teaching the seemingly unteachable, patterning those who need to learn how to walk, gently using medicine and prayer to build strong spirits and hopefully strong bodies for the future.

There is a nutrition centre where malnourished infants and children are treated. The hospital offers medical and dental clinics, a medical laboratory, a pharmacy and a physical therapy department.

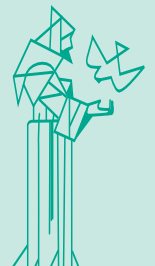
What was once a ruined building shines bright with colored paint and fresh plaster, strong wooden beams, and up-to-date equipment to help God's suffering poor grow stronger.

The hospital, it is said, is never empty. One visitor on returning to the United States from the missions said: "I looked in my closet and just felt I had too much - of everything.

I'll never forget the poor again."

Jesus loved the sick and the poor in the first century. St. Francis imitated his master in the thirteenth century. St. Pedro de San Jose Bentancur carried this charity to Antigua, Guatemala in the seventeenth century. Fr. Jose with your help does the same work in our twenty-first century. ■





Words Worth Noting



He that does good for good's sake seeks neither paradise nor reward, but he is sure of both in the end.
William Penn

The Past always looks better than it was; it's only pleasant because it isn't here.
Finley Peter Dunne

You can best reward a liar by believing nothing of what he says.
Aristippus

A successful marriage is an edifice that must be rebuilt every day.
Andre Maurois

The interesting and inspiring thing about America is that she asks nothing for herself except what she had a right to ask for humanity itself.
Woodrow Wilson

The Church is the only place where someone speaks to me and I do not have to answer back.
Charles deGaulle

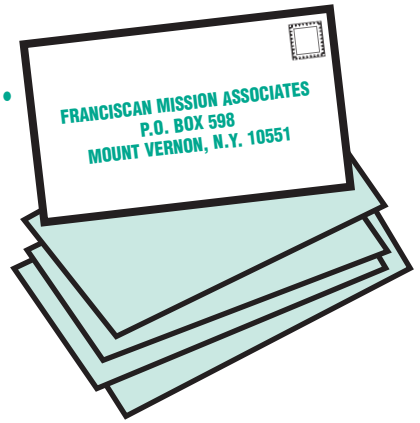
Those who believe are never alone - neither in life nor in death. At that moment, we could call upon the Saints from every age.
Pope Benedict XVI

In my many years I have come to a conclusion that one useless man is a shame, two is a law firm, and three or more is a congress.
John Adams

The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.
Albert Einstein

I am a man of hope, not for human reasons, nor from any natural optimism, but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church and in the world, even when his name remains unheard.
Cardinal Suenens.

Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Fr. Robert:

On behalf of my brethren in Christ and the Chaplaincy of this facility, please accept our most heartfelt appreciation for your donation to our library. This material will provide guidance and inspiration to those who make use of the resources provided. These items will be put immediately into service for all. We will look forward to your continued support to the ministry of the forsaken and outcast of society. May the Lord continue to watch over, abundantly bless, and protect all of you and your Franciscan Mission families.

O. C. L.
Draper, UT

Dear Fr. Robert,

Enclosed please find a check as a sign of thanksgiving for a favor we recently received from our Lord. My husband was unemployed for a little over 13 months and we prayed so hard for him to find a job.

I cannot thank our Savior, Our Blessed Lady, St. Joseph and the Saints for this awesome answer to our prayers. Even though life has its ups and downs, Jesus has never let me fall! Also, the Blessed Mother promised that all who recite the rosary will have their prayers answered! God bless you all. I look forward to reading your letter.

Sincerely,
N. P.
South Glen Falls, NY

Dear Fr. Robert,

Please accept my thanks to the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and St. Anthony for their intercession and answers to my prayers. I am sending a donation of \$25.00 for the missions. Thank you,

E. D.
South Glen Falls, NY

Dear Father Robert,

Many special thanks to The Sacred Heart, St. Jude, St. Anthony, St. Theresa, St. Anne, St. Joseph, and Father Engelmar. Please accept this small gift for a large miracle. For two and a half years, I have prayed for my disability and to understand the pain I was going through. I was turned down and my appeal for disability was denied. My faith was very weak, and at times I felt angry towards God and everyone although I knew in my heart God was in fact listening. I did continue praying no matter how fragile my prayers were at the time.

And to make a long story short, I was granted my disability. A miracle? Yes, my attorney told me all hope was gone. I just buckled down and had a long talk with God, but this time my faith was stronger than ever. Maybe that is what he was waiting for.

A. C. S.
Kingsport, TN

Anthony and the Holy Family

We know a good deal of St. Anthony's devotion to the Child Jesus. Artists since the 13th century have carved or painted such an image of this dynamic preacher, teacher, scholar and priest. Of course, it is just a hop, skip and a jump to move such devotion to the image of the Holy Family:

"Jesus Christ is the King of kings," says Anthony beginning a profound meditation on the Holy Infant - an Infant who was God. Yet, St. Anthony observes:

"Behold then how your king has come to you, in meekness and suffering, desirous of being loved and served."

The God of Creation, God who is Love, chose to enter the world as a loveable infant. He could have come as ages past presumed he would have come: a powerful force on a fiery chariot, ready to annihilate any who would harm his people.

But God did not want to come into the world "feared because of his power." Instead, Anthony says,

"He who is the beginning and the end, the ruler of the angels, made himself obedient to human creatures.

"The creator of the heavens obeys a carpenter.

"The God of eternal glory listens to a poor virgin.

"Has anyone ever witnessed anything comparable to this?

"Has any ear heard anything like this?"

The saint's words are as fine a portrait of the Holy Family as any artist ever achieved. It is an image that underlines the holiness of every family unit.

This year, Christmas Day arrives

on Thursday, December 25. Three days later, the first Sunday after Christmas, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Its powerful First Reading, from the Book of Sirach, a great Jewish teacher and wise man, again stresses the holiness of the family, from the newest life to the eldest.

After listing the blessings showered upon families where young and old are respected and cherished, the reading closes with lines ringing with practical importance in today's world:

My son, take care of your father when he is old...

Even if his mind fail, be considerate with him...

For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, it will serve as a sin offering - it will take lasting root.

(Sirach 3: 12-14)

Today we need to be reminded that families are not about power, or money, or domination or any of the "values" so admired in our culture. Rather, all families are called to be houses of holiness, forgiveness, love, affection, and support. ■

REMEMBRANCE

You can continue to carry on your own good work for the missions and the people they serve by remembering them in your will. To do so, simply make a bequest of whatever you wish to: FRANCISCAN MISSION ASSOCIATES, Mount Vernon, NY 10551. If you wish additional information about how to do this, please feel free to contact:

**Father Robert, O.F.M.
Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 285,
Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

THE SPIRITUAL RESOURCES OF THE CHURCH IN THE US

On December 31, 2008, The Museum of the City of New York is expected to close a popular six-month-long exhibit entitled "Catholics in New York, 1808-1946." The show took up 4,000 square feet and exhibited over 400 artifacts and images. Things like parochial school yearbooks and report cards, vestments, pew rental receipts and poor boxes; parade sashes and hundreds of family portraits, oral and video histories.

The public museum show makes it clear that Catholics who came to New York's harbors seeking religious freedom and better life, grew into a kind of "mosaic" of people who shared a 2000-year-old faith and practice, but little else.

The first migrations arrived in the 1600's, the earliest colonial days of what is now New York - only to find the same religious hatred and oppression they had left behind. For these English, Irish, German, Dutch and African-Americans of Catholic heritage did not enjoy full religious or civil liberties, with brief exceptions, until the American Revolution of 1776 brought about freedom of religion by law.

The later major immigration waves could at least practice their religious faith - despite being despised or discriminated against. Numbered among them: Slovaks, Czechs, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Hispanics, as well as many Puerto Ricans.

Because these pioneering Catholics were often refused public and private institutional services, they dug in and helped create their own.

Together with their church leadership, they helped build up a remarkable network of schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, retreat centers for spiritual growth, and a vast array of services developed by Catholic Charities.

Today, all over America, Catholics can look with pride at similar achievements. It is a fact that 21st Century Catholics can practice their faith because of the sacrifices of their ancestors.

Taking advantage of 200 years of religious freedom, Catholics in America never had to endure the kind of oppression that broke out all over Europe in that same period. There, Christians could not practice their faith for 40 to 100-year periods. Many today recall that Catholics in communist-occupied nations often had bishops named and consecrated in secret. Catholic martyrs were many.

Nothing like that ever happened again in the USA.

Such was the gift of faith and life that can well be celebrated this Christmas season, as the Church in America moves into a Third Century.

A life of faith, of intimate relationship with God in Word and Sacrament tracing back over 2000 years. A life of faith sustained by a support system that is uniquely American and second to none. And always with focus on help for those in need. A faith and life that will hopefully be the bedrock for generations yet unborn. ■

VOCATIONS

All the money in the world will do no good unless we have priests and religious to give their lives to spreading faith in Christ, our Lord.

Please join us in daily prayer, especially during the seasons of Advent and Christmas, for God's grace in providing devoted brothers, sisters, priests, and religious for Christ's work in today's world.

RECALLING THE POWER OF GOD - ST. PEREGRINE

How often does the news media report the tragic story of suicide during the Christmas season? Unfortunately, often, with suicide rates seemingly on the rise each year.

Behavioral scientists say that for the chronically depressed, people often suffering from a chemical imbalance, the happiness and joy of the Christmas season may magnify their own sense of isolation, slowing down their ability to reach out and connect with others.

Ditto for many people dealing with great loss like the death of a loved one, or a job layoff in hard times. Of growing concern are teenagers - children who feel isolated, ridiculed or just plain hopeless, at a time when life is very complex.

Expected to share the joy they see around them, such individuals spiral, instead, into a whirling black hole of despair.

They are certain that not even God could or would help them - even should they find the courage to ask.

So many of us take for granted the teaching we accept from Jesus: That God loves and cares for us. Indeed, has loved us enough to bestow on us the gift of life. And cares for us, even to the hairs on our heads.

And so we reach out to God in confidence - some of us, every day. We place in his loving, caring hands all our happiness, troubles, sorrows;

especially any problems that seem to have no human solution. All can be turned over to God in prayer, with the conviction that God will help us find our way.

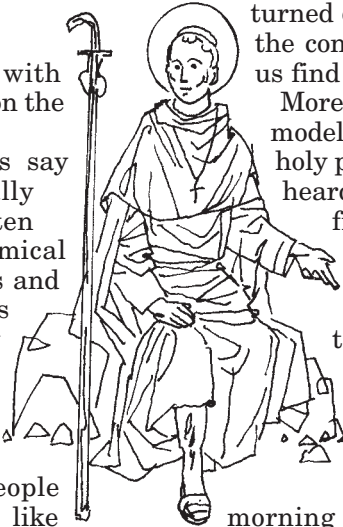
Moreover, we have great role models like St. Peregrine. This holy priest, well into middle age, heard a devastating diagnosis from the medical world of his time, the 14th Century. His painful foot and leg pain were symptoms of an advanced cancer, he was told, with amputation, the only solution. A procedure to be carried out the next morning.

When he emerged that morning from an all-night vigil before the Blessed Sacrament, he had experienced a vision of the Lord, and a complete cure. Fr. Peregrine chose faith and prayer instead of despair.

This season of Advent and Christmas, pray faithfully for those tempted to take their own lives. You may want to concentrate on one individual, someone who has nobody to remember him or her before God. It may be a troubled teenager, or an elderly person who feels utterly alone in the world.

Ask St. Peregrine's help as well.

Pray that those in need may find the strength to step aside from the abyss of despair... to welcome God's help... to prevent the destruction of God's beautiful gift of life in this holy season that celebrates New Life - a gift wrapped up in God's enduring love. ■



Solemn Novena Schedule Advent-Christmas 2008

For the petitions and special intentions of all our benefactors, Franciscan Mission Associates schedules a regular series of spiritual exercises throughout the year.

You are cordially invited to join us in prayer for your own needs and petitions, for those of our Franciscan missionary friars and their people, and for all who cooperate by prayer and sacrifice for the spread of the faith.

During the Advent-Christmas season, these Novenas of Masses have been arranged:

November 21-29For the Faithful Departed
December 1-31The Infant Savior (31 Masses)
December 8-16Immaculate Conception Novena
December 16-24Feast of Christmas
December 24-January 1Feast of Christmas
December 25-January 2Christ Child Novena (in Bethlehem)
January 1-9Holy Family Novena

Holy Mass is offered each day for all Franciscan Mission Associates benefactors and the special intentions they request. So kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

Father Robert, O.F.M.
Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 282, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



Join us on Pilgrimage CELTIC SPIRITUALITY - IRELAND AND ITS SAINTS

12 Days - May 10-21, 2009

*Downpatrick - Armagh - Derry - Connemara - Killarney - Dublin
Glendalough - Knock - Galway and other shrines*

Experience the sense of faith and joy that comes with taking part in the Pilgrimage. We will pray at the shrines sacred to our faith with a Franciscan Spiritual Director.

Dear Father, Please send information on Shrines of Ireland:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Pilgrimage Office, Dept. N, P.O. Box 598, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598
Tel: 914-664-1747 or 914-664-5604