

# FMA FOCUS

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

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

## Virtue: FORGIVENESS

Jesus grew up as an observant Jew, practiced in the prayer, culture, and law of Judaism. A faith that called followers to be holy as God is holy. Including difficult practices like forgiveness, forgiveness of any who ask for it (as the Torah decreed).

But Jesus the teacher (and the Son of God) demanded more. Forgive, even seventy times seven times (Mt 18:21-23). Forgive even one's enemies, He taught.

On Good Friday, the Gospel recalls that Jesus showed us how to do it. Even as He drew His last breaths, dying on the cross, He prayed: "Father, forgive them," speaking on behalf of His own murderers and executioners, "for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:24)

Pray this Lenten season, for the grace and virtue of forgiveness. Remember Our Lord's actions. And as baptized members of His body, made children of God, ask for the strength as He did. ■

## Baptism: Truly the Golden Gate

In the Old Testament or Hebrew Scripture, the Bible takes us back some 6000 years, into a world where our ancestors in faith struggled to become the People of God. Even then, their own language was rich in words that spoke both to life in this world, and life with God. Take the words "gate" or "gateway."

To name a few: the Gates of Paradise, the multiple gates of the Holy City (Jerusalem), the gate to the shepherd's sheep pen. Great or lowly, gates performed the same function: To admit, or to keep out.

On Holy Saturday Night, the evening of our Solemn Easter Vigil, we again renew our commitment to the Golden Gate of spiritual life, Baptism.

On this Holy Night, we gather in darkness with our parish to wait on Christ our Savior – once entombed by sin, hatred, violence. With candle light flickering in the dark, we patiently and prayerfully await and commemorate the moment of Resurrection. The



Lord's...and ours, through Baptism.

Our vigil-keeping celebrates God's Light, God's Holy Word, God's Sacraments of Baptism, and Holy Eucharist — Christ Jesus, who is present now with us, and into eternity. Present to us, if we welcome Him. If we admit Him into our lives.

The Reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, proclaimed on that Holy Night, tells the story. (Romans 6: 3-4)

**“Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Through baptism into His death we were buried with Him – so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.”**

The Golden Gate, to new life.

In the days when Jesus lived in the world, baptism of repentance was a Jewish ritual of those accepting repentance and commitment to a new life. That older baptism was the rite used by John the Baptizer in his ministry. When Jesus presented Himself before John for that ritual, St. Matthew's Gospel tells us that John was horrified, and wanted to refuse.

“I should be baptized by you, yet you come to me!” John exclaimed to his cousin. Jesus understands his cousin's concerns, but quietly motions to the new age, about to dawn. “We must do this if we would fulfill all of God's demands,” he said. With that, John gave in (Mt 3: 13-15) and baptized Jesus.

As Jesus arose, bolting out of the Jordan, they heard the voice of God proclaim: “This is my beloved son. My favor rests on him.”

With that older baptismal form, the gates of salvation history opened to a new age. A Baptism with water that would call human beings to an entirely new life: to live as God's own adopted children.

And so candidates for Baptism during the Easter Vigil (and at all times) are asked what they seek. Later, all in the congregation are invited to renew baptismal vows. For God offers but does not force this grace on anyone. We can agree to step through the Golden Gate to new life, as John the Baptist agreed to do, or we can refuse.

Pray for renewed understanding and living out of our baptismal vows – for the new and the older baptized, Christ's beloved all over the world, on this, our Night of Nights.

It is a prayer that will illuminate all those Easter days to follow. As we are blessed and dismissed on this holiest of nights, we walk joyfully out the Church doors, into a night steeped in darkness. But a night lighting our paths back into the world. A world where God holds out a unique ministry for each of us in building his kingdom here on earth and into eternity. ■

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# Water: Its mystical significance

In the Old Testament, water was a life saving gift. God's Chosen People understood the vital significance of water for a desert people. Ritual cleansing became normative, both as a health practice and as a reminder of God's law and presence among them.

And so, water took on spiritual significance: whether the memories of the waters of the Red Sea, or the water flowing from the Rock at Meribah. Or the ordinary water of the Jordan – even the rains that fell from heaven. All took on spiritual significance in Hebrew history.

In the Gospels, water is a frequent symbol of God's love and presence, woven into the Gospel account of Christ's ministry.

- "...Whoever gives so much as a drink of cold water" Jesus teaches, to any of the Lord's disciples, "will not go unrewarded." (Mt 10:42)

- "Give me a drink," Jesus asks of a Samaritan woman at the communal well in Shechem. In the course of this exchange, Jesus will tell her that He is the expected Messiah, and that "whoever drinks the water I give... will never be thirsty." (Jn 4: 7-14, 25-26)

- "I thirst," Jesus cries out from the Cross (Lk 23:36), with a thirst for more than water alone.

- Ritual cleansing takes on profound spiritual meaning and teaching during the Last Supper Jesus celebrated in this world.

On Holy Thursday evening, the Gospel for the Triduum Mass of the Lord's Supper brings us back to that Night when Jesus "poured water into a basin and began to wash his

disciples' feet and dry them with the towel he had around him. Thus he came to Simon Peter."

It was Peter, who with the Holy Spirit's prompting, had proclaimed Jesus' true identity early in Christ's public ministry. But now, Peter questions and even interrupts Jesus... making the judgment that he and everyone else present that night is unworthy of service from Jesus (Jn 13: 1-17)! He refuses.

"Unless I do this," Jesus says, rebuking his own chosen leader of the Apostles and the Church-that-will-be, "you'll have no part of me."

And that's enough for Peter. Humbled and graced, he replies, "Lord, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."

Following that ritual, the cleansing of feet for each of the Apostles, Jesus explained what it means. "What I just did was to give you an example; as I have done, so you must do." A lesson for the Apostles, but also for Christians down the ages.

And so on Holy Thursday evening, the Mass commemorates this lesson with the Washing of Feet in our time. The priest celebrant officiates, washing the feet of selected parishioners. (Very often, they will be 12 in number). Like Jesus, the priest demonstrates that holy service to others as a key element of Christian living.

On Holy Thursday pray in thanksgiving for God's gift of water: the precious resource – and the reminder of God's holy Presence in our midst. Pray for the grace to respond, in service to others, and in stewardship of God's gifts. ■

# THE WISDOM OF FRANCIS

Should there ever be a contest seeking a “theme song” for the environment, we know the winner: St. Francis for his prayer-hymn, “Canticle of the Creatures.” For his Canticle salutes Nature (with a capital ‘n’ meaning God’s creation) as gift, and the Creator as giver. As St. Francis experienced it, he sang with words woven of the delicate complementary relationship between our world and the people God has charged with its stewardship.



When asked, Francis spoke of being “shown two lights.” Looking at the first, he was given a realization “of who the Creator is... I saw the depths of the infinite goodness of God.”

The second light held up a mirror image most of us could never survive seeing. In that image, Francis could see “who I am... the deplorable depths of my own nothingness.”

In that God-given image, Francis surely saw a man rich in spiritual gifts, for God is a God of truth. Yet, he saw himself still struggling, pushing up out of the slippery dark hole of sin. Even while committed to Jesus with all his heart and soul; yet, still a man capable of sin in all its forms. Even as he was a man ever hopeful of the Lord’s promise of eternal life.

A complex, terrifying vision, we would say. Not Francis. He found beauty, even in such a revelation of who he was.

This mystical experience confirmed Francis’ conviction of long-standing. He understood that all humankind, all Creation, is united – by God’s grace. A work-in-progress, with a long way to go. Each day. Every day.

It is a wisdom born of the same reverence for God’s Creation that Francis demonstrated daily during his lifetime of commitment to Jesus. Today, we can count on him to hear our prayers, and to help us address the environmental needs impacting our “today” and our children’s “tomorrows.” ■

**All praise be yours, my Lord,  
for Sister Earth, our mother  
who feeds us, rules us  
and produces all sorts of fruit  
and colored flowers and herbs.**

In that one stanza, Francis demonstrates a knowledge and understanding that people of faith call mystical wisdom. For with Francis of Assisi, there was one Person at the heart of these relationships: God the Creator.

Francis experienced all creation, animate, inanimate, as the work of God. A work always in progress. It was a vision that sustained him, even in the blindness of his own final days. For his love of Creation was anchored in deep prayer and mystical union with God, the Creator.

Brother Leo would tell of a prayer he heard St. Francis repeat over and over, late one night. It was the year when Francis received the Stigmata, 1224. The prayer, short and quick, ended with Francis calling himself a “worm.”

# The hardworking, successful St. Joseph

St. Joseph's feast day, March 19, falls this year on Thursday of the Third Week of Lent. This solemn feast honors Joseph, as the Husband of Mary.

This Lent, however, consider calling on St. Joseph by two other titles: Patron of the Family and of Fathers. Ask his help for so many children, living without the love and guidance of a father in their lives. History may well see today's fatherless children as a crisis every bit as serious as that of the world's environmental issues.

With a prayerful heart, accompany St. Joseph through St. Luke's Gospel account of Jesus, Lost and Found in the Temple (Lk 2: 41-51). A prayerful reading peels away any notion of the "Finding" as a "happy ending" tale.

Walk nonstop with Joseph over those nearly three days (and sleepless nights) of frantic searching for young Jesus.

No doubt Joseph keeps his worst fears from Mary. Yet, flashbacks of Herod's murderous wrath toward the Holy Child still seared this loving father's mind. Likewise, the haunting cries of innocent baby boys slaughtered in Herod's wake. Ditto, the sour taste of exile in a foreign land – all because selfish, powerful men feared Who Jesus was.

As he and Mary pushed themselves beyond fatigue, at last backtracking their steps over the narrow stone streets of Jerusalem, Joseph had to wonder: During this Passover, had someone with powerful connections recognized Jesus? Someone still seeking Jesus' death?

Reverie is shattered by Mary's tearful outcry when they finally see Jesus. And where? In the Temple. Lecturing and questioning the

scholars, priests, and lawyers! Those men of power, and connections.

More dangerous still: Jesus answered his mother's questions with a question that would raise eyebrows. "...*Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?*"

Hearing that, Joseph was forced to act. For these powerful men knew very well what **Father** owned this "house," the Temple of God. There must be no more questions.

And so with a father's authority, Joseph steps in. He clasps Jesus firmly, moving him toward his mother and the doorway, and hopefully, home. No doubt Joseph apologizes to and thanks the learned assembly for their "generous" time given to a child. The Child who now would obey his father and go home.

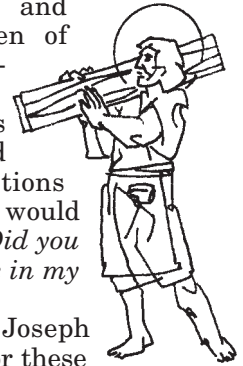
Home, to the safe obscurity of Nazareth, and a "normal" life. Living and learning as son of Joseph, a carpenter renowned throughout Galilee.

Once home again, Luke tells us, Jesus behaved. And Mary "kept all these things in memory."

Indeed. One of the memories she would live again, at the foot of the Cross, 21 years later. Without her Joseph's strength and love. After her Son's last Passover.



This Easter, ask St. Joseph's help for today's orphans of war, genocide, natural disasters, violence, addictions, broken families, and groupings without marriage. We know St. Joseph will never turn his back on children in danger. ■



# REFORMING A WASTEFUL SOCIETY

See if you find yourself in either or both of these two groups, now found in nearly every community:

1) The “Green” brigade – Individuals who chart the amount of energy they now conserve, versus what they formerly used. And so they “measure” the size of their “carbon footprint” today and its impact on the future. The aim: Cutting back on chemicals or practices that harm the world and its people.

2) The Community “Caretakers,” for want of a better term. They may be the neighbors who carefully sort and separate *recyclables*, cut back on their use of plastics, glass, cans, and paper garbage. Others are mayors and public executives accountable for the state of landfills, dumps, and hazardous waste sites.

At the heart of these concerns: The cost and recognition of wasteful ways. The silly, thoughtless wastefulness responsible for dragging the world down to its present state of environmental crisis.

Few people were surprised to hear Pope Benedict XVI inject moral responsibility into discussion of environmental concerns, during his

address to the United Nations. Even a decade before, the late Pope John Paul II had done likewise.

Beginning with individuals who make up our society, we need to: (1) examine our conscience about how we use God’s gift of Creation. (2) Acknowledge our faults. And, (3) Take positive steps to correct those faults.

The first Reading for our Solemn Easter Vigil service brings us back to God’s Plan. From the Book of Genesis, we hear an ancient telling inspired by the Holy Spirit:

**In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth...**

**And so it happened...**

**God saw how good it was...**

**God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good...**

(Genesis 1: 1 through 2:2)

Seven times in this account of six days’ work, we hear that God finds His Creation to be very good. The stars and heavenly bodies, the land and waters of the earth, the air and winds, the teaming abundance of living creatures (cattle, creeping things and animals of all kinds) and the human beings created in the image of God: all were found to be “very good.”

And we hear God’s message: In assigning “dominion” over Creation to humankind, He speaks to our responsibility for the care of the “good” creation He brought into being.

Responsibility is now the buzzword of environmentalists worldwide, with emphasis on individual responsibility.

It is the same message St. Francis sang with his whole lifetime in God’s service. It is the message our Church is addressing in many languages, worldwide.

Today, right now, response must begin with each one of us. For it is individuals who make up communities of stewardship in God’s creation. ■

## 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:**

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# 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,

A friend of mine, the father of a large family, told me of the spiritual *ABCs* he'd been introduced to.

You don't mean "Always Be Careful," I asked (good advice when faced with temptation). He laughed and said there were actually three sets of spiritual *ABCs* his children had to learn.

**First:** *Always Bear Christ.* Whatever comes to you, joy or pain, pleasure or sorrow, comes with Christ's strengthening you to turn it to good. Thus, joy, you thank him for. Pain, you ask his help to stand. Pleasure, you ask to enjoy fully as he did good things of the world in his earthly life. Sorrow, you ask to see with his eyes and join him in offering it to the Father.

**Second:** *Always Bring Christ.* Go everywhere with Christ at your side. As the prayer of St. Patrick beautifully says (his is a Lenten memorial), "Let Christ be beside you, before you, above you, beneath you—all around you like a glowing ring of love." This puts us on our best behavior at all times. We know he is there.

**Third:** *Always Be Christ.* Bishops and priests are not the only ones who are to be "other Christs." All Christians carry his name and are Christ to those they meet. A father or mother is a path of grace for the family's children. A brother or sister is a path of grace for parents, too, particularly as the latter grow older and roles are reversed.

The spiritual *ABCs*. Be sure you know them well! I understand examination time comes later, of course; but we'll all have to take one some day. Best to be ready.

Thanks for being such faithful followers of Christ and such generous supporters of our Franciscan Missions.

Cordially in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Robert, OFM". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.



## A LIFETIME SERVICE

*Fr. Valentine Gesuale, O.F.M.*



**P**ittsburgh native Fr. Valentine Gesuale, O.F.M., ended a 43-year stint as a missionary in Central America when a massive heart attack claimed his life at 70 on October 11, 2008. Long a health enthusiast, with a shock of white hair and athletic build, he seemed almost immune to life's ills.

Love of the province's missions was fostered from seminary days. Shortly after ordination in 1965, Fr. Valentine reported to Comayagua, Honduras, the country's first capital, where he did language studies and gained initial experiences under the watchful eye of Bishop Bernardine Mazzarella, O.F.M., the local bishop. He next served as pastor of a near-by parish for two years.

But his major contribution was in the area of education. He devoted 15 years to service at the instituto San Francisco, the friars' 3000-student school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as teacher, vice-rector, rector, and local superior or guardian.

During this time Father was given a special assignment that would have occupied someone else with less energy fulltime. He was asked to supervise the work on what is today the Bernard Dazzi Village, named after the founder and long-time director of Franciscan Mission Associates and funded by our group's generous benefactors.

This was no easy task. Heavy-duty machinery had to be purchased abroad and imported into the country; specially trained operators had to be hired; architects and engineers were commissioned to make the plans and lay out the infrastructure; a whole mountainside, literally, had to be cut away to provide room for a beautiful church dedicated to St. Clare of Assisi and the initial 134 four-room homes that were distributed to eligible buyers by lottery. A local bank was enlisted to supervise the modest mortgage payments of the new owners and to utilize the income to add further homes.

His last years saw Father Valentine doing what Franciscans aspire to do always—living the gospel life with simplicity and joy of heart and proclaiming the Good News in direct ministry to God's people. His human traits—his warmth, politeness, genuine friendliness and acceptance of others—easily won him many devoted friends.

Provincial Minister, Father Robert, O.F.M., in a homily at the funeral Mass concelebrated in Father Valentine's home parish in Pittsburgh (and attended by his eight siblings and their families), quoted English poet John Donne: "When a man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book but translated into a better language." The mission (and longest) chapter of Father Valentine's life is an integral part not only of his own story but of that of the Church in Central America where our friars have upheld for sixty-four years the enduring five-hundred-year legacy of the first zealous Franciscan missionaries. ■



loss of moral values, and spiritual decay have given rise to youth gangs terrorizing Salvadoran society. But when I arrived at my destination, a quaint little town called Ataco, I saw a light of hope shine!

Not all Salvadorans are violent. Not all young people belong to gangs. The majority of Salvadorans are hard-working, courageous people who have risen from a devastating civil war and many earthquakes. In Ataco, I met youngsters who would deserve to be on front pages of newspapers more than do the criminals who get so much publicity. I was there to give them a workshop on sexuality from the Christian standpoint and was impressed by their sensitivity to God.

Gente Joven (literally, Young People) is a drug-and gang-prevention social program at Agape that trains young leaders in areas such as community organization, emotional development, conflict resolution, psycho-active substances, sexuality and abstinence, assertive communication, and other areas, in order to make a positive contribution to Salvadoran society.

Noemi is a 12-year-old girl who climbs a mountain to pray the rosary, sings in the church choir, and walks long distances to get water from a well. She lives in a little



## MESSENGERS OF HOPE

*Sr. Maria Luisa Meza*

**T**raveling along the picturesque "Road of the Flowers" in Ahuachapan, El Salvador, on a missionary trip to one of Agape's social programs for young people, I was admiring the tropical beauty of this Central American country when I suddenly spotted a pile of garbage at the edge of the highway. Next to the garbage lay a dead body, still bleeding and decapitated.

A vicious cycle of extreme poverty,

shack with no electricity. Noemi has received a public-speaking award and has been selected to give a speech before El Salvador's president.

Rafael Antonio is 15 years old; he did not finish 9th grade because his family could not afford the \$5 monthly tuition. His house was destroyed during the 2001 earthquake and he helped his father rebuild it. He works at a youth house, an Agape project that enables young people to offer computer services to the population of Ataco.

These youngsters are only a few of the many unknown heroes whose accomplishments are not widely

publicized but who write, with their simple lives, praiseworthy pages full of hope for this poverty-stricken country. Fulfilling their daily obligations with great sacrifices, young people such as these help build a better world. As long as we have programs such as Gente Joven, there shines a light of hope in the midst of so much darkness for our youth! ■



# Words Worth Noting



*God gave us the greatest proof of love that the world has ever seen.*

*Andrew Murray*

*We did not dare to breathe a prayer, or give our anguish scope. Something was dead within each of us, and what was dead was Hope.*

*Oscar Wilde*

*The more I think over, the more I feel that there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people.*

*Vincent Van Gogh*

*Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue.*

*Eugene O'Neil*

*Life must be lived forwards, but it can be understood only backwards.*

*Soren Kierkegaard*

*Faith is not intelligent understanding, faith is deliberate commitment to a Person where I see no way.*

*Oswald Chambers*

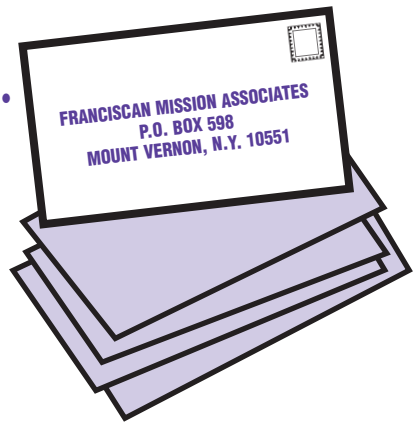
*Every happening, great or small is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message.*

*Malcolm Muggeridge*

*We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.*

*C. S. Lewis*

# Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Father,

Thank you for the opportunity to reach out to us readers. I know lots of people who are sick with cancer. I love what you are doing with prayer procedure. There should be more blessings and prayers spread throughout the world. I'm glad I have taken the first step to admitting I would like to help others by joining you in prayer. THANKS.

E. J.  
New York, NY

Dear Father Robert,

Thank you very much for having enrolled my daughter (for her glaucoma condition), my granddaughters and myself in the St. Anthony Mission League. Thank you also for your special prayers and the candles lit for our intentions.

God bless you and your Mission always. I shall pray for you that God gives you the strength to carry on His work.

A.S.  
Kingston, Jamaica

Dear Father Robert,

Please publish my thanks to St. Anthony, St. Jude, Mother Mary, St. Rita and St. Joseph for favors received on behalf of my sister, spouse and brother-in-law. God bless.

K. D.  
Springfield, MO

Father Robert,

Enclosed is our check in Thanksgiving for a favor received. We were victims of identity theft, and we made a novena to my beloved St. Anthony, and lo and behold what could have been a long and difficult journey was quickly resolved successfully to our advantage. This isn't the first time St. Anthony saved the day for us.

God bless and keep up the good work.

D. L. K.  
Irvine, CA

Dear Father,

I promised St. Jude a donation and to publish my thanksgiving if my surgery for breast cancer went well - peace of mind and not fear nor worry. I don't and didn't have chemo, but do take pills for the condition. Please publish my thanks to St. Jude and St. Anthony for answering my prayers. I am enclosing \$25 for your work and thanks.

D.D.  
Banning, CA

# CELEBRATING HOLY DAYS IN OUR SOCIETY

This year, the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord (Holy Thursday) falls on May 21. This yearly feast, always a part of the glorious 50 Days of Easter, is perfectly timed this year. For it blossoms in praise of Christ's glory at a time when all of nature bursts forth in full springtime extravaganza in the USA.

Holy Thursday is by its very nature, however, one of those mid-week holy days. As such it presents challenges. The foremost.

How best to fully celebrate this day? From getting to Mass on time, to finding time to hear what God may have to say, how He may need our cooperation to grace our lives. Here are some suggestions:

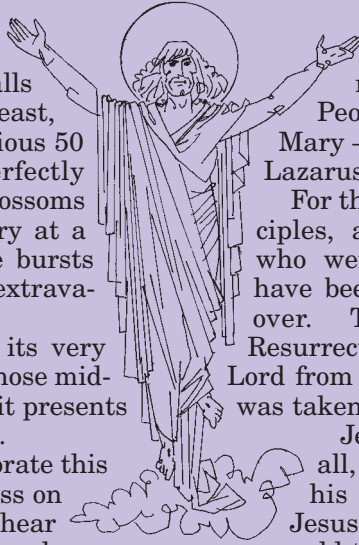
1) Treat the day as "special." Dress in your Sunday attire, even at work, or school, if allowed.

2) Make mealtime festive. With a dinner for the whole family, and time to pray together and talk about this great Feast. What does it mean and how does it make your "tomorrow" different?

3) Try to find some time in the day to squeeze in a "sabbath rest" with Jesus. Perhaps you can focus on one way this Holy Day enriches the pilgrimage and ministry God has offered you.

The Mass of the day spills over with the joy and hope of The Ascension of the Lord. Though it celebrates Jesus going home to the Father, it is a beginning, not an ending.

Because we are human beings, however, and not angels, the Ascension gives us much to ponder. For one: What must have been the



state of mind of the men and women who witnessed the Ascension?

People like Peter, surely Mary – maybe even Martha and Lazarus? People like us?

For those people, the Lord's disciples, apostles, and yes, those who were friends — this must have been a day of sorrow, twice over. The miracle of the Resurrection had returned their Lord from the dead. And now Jesus was taken away, again.

Jesus had prepared them all, many times. To complete his ministry, his mission, Jesus would "pass from this world to the Father." Now, it had happened. But what had happened? Where did he go?

What human being does not know a similar depth of loss when a beloved leaves this world? Or who among us does not wonder what happens when we, ourselves, "return to the Father?"

In time, those friends, family and disciples, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, recovered from that all too human sense of loss. The Ascension, that moment of Jesus' glory, took them forward, to the next step: the Lord's promise one day awaiting them as members of Christ's body.

As we ponder these age-old questions, let the song of the Responsorial Psalm for Ascension Day echo in our hearts:

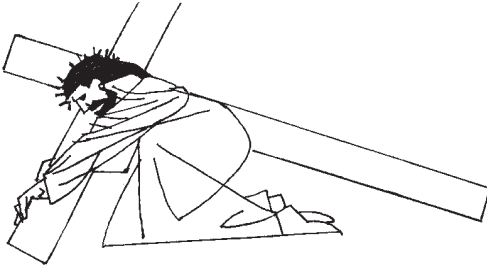
**All you peoples, clap your hands,  
shout to God with cries of  
gladness...**

**God mounts his throne to shouts  
of joy;**

**a blare of trumpets for the Lord.**

Psalm 47: 2, 6 ■

# THE WAY OF THE CROSS – MAKING LENT MOVE ALONG



Few people talk about it, but many feel that way. To wit: Lent is a very long time.

And it's true.

Lent is today a penitential season counted out of 40 weekdays and six Sundays leading up to the most important day of the Church Year, Easter Sunday.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2009, Lent concludes with the first Liturgy of the Sacred Triduum: the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday evening, April 9, 2009.

One of the oldest prayer forms that can help us use this time wisely is the Stations of the Cross. These days, its older title, the Way of the Cross is growing in popularity. A title stretching even to the Tradition of Our Lady, many times prayerfully retracing her Son's final walk.

While we are all encouraged to attend Stations scheduled in our parish, this devotion also lends itself to home-based prayer. An excellent meditation form in Lent. Especially if you tackle it with this formula: A Station-a-Day, every day.

To try the Station-a-Day format, the only requirement is commitment to 5 or 10 minutes daily. You will also need to pick out a quiet space for this reverent prayer.

To refresh your memory, look up the Stations in your prayer book or

missal. You may find a supply of booklets for the Stations in your parish library – for there are many formats today.

Some add a 15th Station – the Resurrection. Others, like the “Way” introduced by Pope John Paul II on Good Friday, 1991, look to the Gospel. These “Stations” follow the Way of the Cross based entirely on the progression of the Passion in Gospel texts. Pope John Paul II begins his solemn meditations with Jesus in the Garden.

Whatever your preference, select one format. Begin on Ash Wednesday. And before you realize it, the first 14 days will have sped by.

You may then want to pick up a different style of the Stations. In just two more weeks, you can move to yet another.

Each day, you will find yourself looking forward to your appointment with Jesus, keeping him company, walking with him on the way to Calvary, and to the Resurrection.

And oh, yes. With three complete Stations of the Cross, each approached one day at a time, you will find yourself at the end of Lent!

The benefits will be many.

Above all, walking the Way of the Cross brings you to a greater level of intimacy with Jesus. Savior, Lord, Teacher, and ever your reliable Friend.

And you may well find out that this Lent, having walked the “Way” with Jesus every day, has been the best in memory.

You will also surely find that the Fifty Days of Easter that follow our Greatest Feast will hold out many moments of grace for you and yours.



## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WILL FOR OTHERS (ST. DYPHNA)

The teenage Celtic princess we know as St. Dymphna was graced by God with the ability to trust others, even in the perilous world of the Seventh Century. Dymphna was the daughter of a pagan chieftain/king – one of those leaders nearly always going off to battle — and his beautiful queen, a devout Christian. The child's faith in God came with her mother's teaching and guidance. She was very likely also educated by her mother's chaplain and confessor, St. Gerebernus. (General education was another task expected of priests at that time).

When the young queen died, Dymphna's world crumbled. The King lapsed into madness, culminating in his desire to make Dymphna his new queen.

By this time in her early teen years, the princess did not crumble. She did what her mother would do: seek advice from the chaplain, the priest who was a true father figure all of her life. He spoke of a plan she already knew was the only escape. Thus, with Fr. Gerebernus and his two companions, Dymphna left her home. Setting out across the seas, they at last came safely ashore in what is today, Belgium. There, they soon established a hermitage, putting down new roots in Gheel.

Their Hermitage drew others from towns and regions far and wide. Many of the pilgrims were outcasts: seriously ill people chased out of their homes and towns, with nowhere else to go. Here,

Dymphna found her vocation: Bringing God's love to the needy and abandoned people.

When her father and his soldiers successfully tracked the Hermits to Gheel, the young princess and her advisors were martyred and left there.

Over the next 600 years, many miracles were reported by pilgrims flocking to Gheel. Like the original pilgrims who came to Dymphna and her companions, they were often epileptics, the mentally ill. Perhaps many exhibited symptoms of the disorder we now call Alzheimer's.

Today thousands of pilgrims visit the Great Shrine at Gheel. They seek Dymphna's guidance and example. And like her, they put their trust in God and God's will.

All over the world, people dealing with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or other dementia disorders also go the Gheel, in prayer and spiritual pilgrimage. Patients and care givers alike ask St. Dymphna's help, even for the grace of resting with God's will in their own lives.

In the season of Lent that move into Eastertime so quickly, ask the grace of St. Dymphna's guidance for those countless families struggling with these yet-to-be-conquered illnesses. Pray for them as they trust in God and God's great love and grace. Pray as well for the health care providers and scientists whose work may one day eliminate this life-altering disease cluster. ■

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### ST. ANTHONY'S BREAD

Offerings in honor of St. Anthony, either in petition for a favor sought, or in thanksgiving for a favor received, are used to assist the poor. Thus, they have received the name, St. Anthony's Bread. Such offerings are also used to help educate priests and religious.

Father Robert will gladly send you a leaflet explaining the origin and purpose of this devout practice, now centuries old. Please write:

**St. Anthony's Bread, Franciscan Mission Associates  
PO Box 598, Dept 382, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

# FMA Spiritual Exercises Lent-Easter 2009

For the petitions and special intentions of all our benefactors, Franciscan Mission Associates will conduct this series of spiritual exercises during the Lenten and Easter season.

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 Lenten-Easter Season these Novenas of Masses have been arranged:

- February 2-10 / February 11-19 .....Our Lady of Lourdes
- February 25 - April 5 .....Lenten Masses (40)
- March 31 - April 8.....Passiontide
- April 12 - April 20.....The Risen Christ...in thanksgiving
- April 14-June 9 .....9 Tuesdays to St. Anthony

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.

**Father Robert, O.F.M., Franciscan Mission Associates  
PO Box 598, Dept. 386, 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*



### 11 Day Pilgrimage - May 18-28, 2010

*Austria - Germany - Switzerland  
Featuring Oberammergau Passion Play*

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 Pilgrimage to:

- Ireland
- Austria - Germany - Switzerland

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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