

FMA

FOCUS



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

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Virtue: PERFECTION

The idea that human beings could be "perfect" likely shocked people listening to Our Lord's "Sermon on the Mount."

"In a word, *you must be made perfect* as your heavenly Father is perfect," Jesus taught (Matthew 5: 48). Surrendering to this path, "will prove that you are sons of our heavenly Father." (Matthew 5: 45)

For keeping the law is not enough, Jesus said. Even "pagans" can do that.

Nor is seeking perfection (holiness) optional. "My *command* to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors," he continued, citing just two examples putting this command into action.

Basic to the teaching: More is expected of people God has adopted and loved as His own... made in His image and likeness, called to be perfect, holy. (Leviticus, 19: 1-2)

No easy task, then or now. Seeking the perfection that God commands is a lifelong pilgrimage, a path of grace and virtue. ■

Living the "Perfect" Christian Life on Earth

It is doubtful that there could be more difficult times for living a Christian life than those perilous years before St. Peter was executed (64 to 67AD) in Rome. Many trace the First Epistle of Peter to that period. Martyrdom was in the air.



This letter from "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ" was addressed to "those who live as strangers." That is, Christians living in a pagan culture. In particular, Christian communities living in Asia Minor, in Galatia, Capadocia and other outposts in the Roman Empire.

Many scholars see this Epistle one of the clearest explanations of Baptism and life of the baptized. So much so that early baptismal liturgies may have been copied into the text. Whatever the background, the Church's first pope writes to his flock, reminding them of how baptism anchors their lives.

Peter reviews their belief in the living Presence of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and how the death and resurrection of Jesus impacts all of life, even the everyday life of struggling Christians.

He points out what makes a Christian's life different. *"Become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you."* (1 Pet 1: 15)

St. Peter a devout Jew, like his fellow Apostles, knew Scriptures well. So he takes his readers back in time. To the Book of Leviticus – one of the five books of the Pentateuch, that collection revered by the Hebrews as the Law or Torah. And back yet further, to the days before great Scrolls were compiled. Days and nights when the Hebrews heard the Scriptures proclaimed aloud, from memory, around camp fires that warmed the cold desert nights. Back to the days when the Hebrews themselves were the "strangers" surrounded by pagans.

"Remember," Peter reviews for his flock, "Scripture says 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" (Leviticus 19: 1-3)

These young Christians knew how Our Savior's ancestors survived those hard times. They kept the Commandments, observed God's Laws, and listened to and learned from their priests and rabbis.

These early Christians in Asia Minor also knew that they were born to an ages with even greater advantages. For the Risen Lord was with them still. They had come to believe that God is always near... and with God, even the impossible is possible.

It was a good plan then – as it is today.

To embark on the road to perfection, to holiness in our own times, Christians are blessed. So much so that comparisons might just tempt our ancestors in the old Roman Empire to sins of envy.

Walking the road to perfection and holiness comes down to a free will decision: With God's grace, are we willing to do as Jesus asked: to deepen our love of God, and our relationship with Him? As well as to love our neighbor as ourselves, and most importantly – learn to let ourselves be loved by God?

- Our parishes offer access to the Sacraments, to Holy Mass, to continuing education and to devotions.

- Our heritage holds out role models: great saints like Francis, Anthony, Clare, Teresa of Avila, and yes, Peter and the Apostles... and so many more. These were men and women like ourselves: coming from different cultures and education struggling with the darkness of sin and fear, hatred and discrimination. We can surely find among the saints many who will fit our own "profile" of helpful mentors who can help us discover our own Way to God.

- Confessors, spiritual directors are available to help us deepen our personal relationship with God... pointing out how to make time for God... how to sit and wait on the Holy Presence who welcomes us always... and to learn to listen and to be available to Him from the depths of our hearts.

- And we have a holy Spiritual Mother, Mary the Mother of God. We can pray to become more like Our Lady. Pray for the grace and courage to say "Yes" to God, trusting in the Lord for all the rest.



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Performing the 'Works of Mercy'

It doesn't take the Labor Day Holiday for us to figure it out. It's clear. People like work. They find the disciplined application of their skills and talents to specific goals and services to be very satisfying.

Our Lord taught us that even God's work of Creation is ongoing. And there is plenty of it to go around. To wit: bringing about God's Kingdom in this world. That's what discipleship is all about. For God's work, we need not fear being over or under qualified. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will give us all the help we need.

These jobs won't be found in the want ads. A quick review of those lists we learned by heart from our catechism will put us on track. Namely, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

What we often forget or overlook about these Works: They flow from our baptism, confirmation, and yes, the reception of Holy Communion.

Once we are initiated as members of the Mystical body, we can count on the Holy Spirit's help in building the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit provides our focus, our energy, and our "pay" – so to speak.

With either set of Works, the word "Mercy" is better rendered, linguists say, as "Compassion." A good point since none of the glaring needs can be addressed without compassion.

The Corporal Works:

- Feed the Hungry
- Give drink to the Thirsty
- Clothe the Naked
- Shelter the Homeless
- Visit the Sick
- Visit the Imprisoned (sometimes listed as Ransom the Captive)



Bury the Dead

The first four are clearly charitable works, the kind the whole community eagerly attends. The last is woven into Catholic life, even in our sacraments and wake rituals. Attending to the dying and spending time with the terminally ill also fit well under this heading. The "Visiting" works frequently become parish ministries as well as family-life concerns.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are listed distinctly because motivation is spiritual. Prayer must be a part of our response to each compassionate need:

- Instruct the Ignorant
- Counsel the Doubtful
- Admonish the Sinner
- Bear Wrongs Patiently
- Forgive Offenses
- Pray for the Living and the Dead

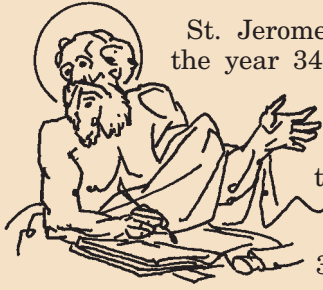
The day-after-day work of Catholic Charities comes to mind with this list. But more is needed; our work, our contribution. Our own response to The Spiritual Works of Mercy.

In addressing the Spiritual Works of Mercy, our question must be: "What would Jesus do?" Then, "What is my work here?" And then: prayer, and perhaps even seeking counsel as to how we go about doing our part in this compassionate work of the Lord.

Yet again, more prayer is needed. Specifically, thanking God for the invitation, the privilege of working for and with Him.

Perhaps you've applied already. If so, how about another go-round, as the formerly retired would have it? The world is filled with need. The Holy Spirit awaits. ■

LOVE OF SCRIPTURE: ST. JEROME



St. Jerome was born in the year 342 in a part of the Roman Empire called Dalmatia, today, Croatia. He came into the world just 31 years after an Edict of

Tolerance formally put an end to the legal persecution of Christians. Shortly after, the conversion of Emperor Constantine would make Christianity respectable, and eventually the acceptable faith throughout the Empire.

Yet, the future St. Jerome, whom we venerate as a great priest and doctor of the Church — indeed, the father of biblical scholarship — demonstrated no early calling to sainthood or a love of the Bible.

Called Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, he was born to a well-to-do family able to provide the best education for their bright son. It would be his intellectual curiosity and gnawing hunger for something more, that led him to Christianity. He was 18 years old when Pope Liberius baptized the future saint.

After further study and travel in Europe, St. Jerome came home and changed his life forever. He joined a group of young scholars lead by Bishop Valerian, in his home town of Aquileia. Within a short time there, his quick temper and sharp tongue — a lifelong characteristic — led to conflict with other scholars.

But it was his growing love of Christ that drew him to the Middle East, settling first in the ancient city of Antioch. There he would be ordained to the priesthood, following

several years as hermit in the Syrian Desert. It was during those hermit years that Jerome mastered Hebrew and a smattering of ancient languages. It was the skill that proved invaluable to the major work of his lifetime: Translation of the entire Bible, Hebrew and Christian books, into a unified Latin Edition, called the Vulgate. That monumental achievement became the basis of biblical scholarship for 16 centuries.

Returning to Rome for a period of service to the papacy, he was still drawn to Christ's homeland. He returned, this time as a pilgrim. He gratefully and humbly traced the steps and hills and pathways where Jesus lived, taught, died and rose again.

This time, the Lord's homeland became Jerome's home. He settled in Bethlehem. His home, office and hermitage: the humble cave believed to be the stable where the God-Man first dwelt among us. It was there that he completed his great biblical work, an achievement that allowed the known world to read and study God's Holy Word.

Jerome died in Bethlehem, on September 30, 420 A.D. Pilgrims today can visit the site believed to be St. Jerome's "cave" home. They reach it by descending a narrow, steep stairway, deep within a complex near Bethlehem's most famous shrine, the Grotto of the Nativity, and the adjacent Church of St. Catherine.

The Church Calendar celebrates St. Jerome, his inspiring faith and heritage on September 30th. Fittingly, it is a time when schools are back in full session in many parts of the world. A good day to pray for students everywhere. ■

Francis the Reconciler

It is said that many people preached the Gospel, but that St. Francis *lived* the Gospel of the Lord. His preaching drew crowds and changed lives. Many credited the fiery friar's gifts as poet and troubadour. Others cited his use of clear unmistakable language as the magnet that drew people of all walks of life to listen and act on Francis' preaching.

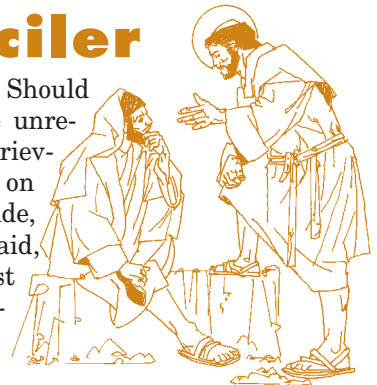
The truth was less complex. People could see that Francis and his friars lived the Gospel they preached. Even to the hard teachings. Like reconciliation.

In the great discourse we treasure as *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew, Chapters 5 through 7), Jesus amazed and perplexed the crowds gathered to hear him. Speaking "with authority" as St. Matthew summed up the crowd's assessment; Jesus challenged people to go beyond the minimum requirements of leading a good life at home and in the community. In fact he commanded them (and us) to go beyond what is challenging enough: careful observance of God's gift of the Law and the Commandments.

More is surely expected of a people God called to be his children; that is the gist of Jesus' instruction. "In a word," Jesus said, "you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). As the saying goes, like father, like son (or daughter).

Reconciling with one another is part of that "perfect" life God expected of his children. Jesus provided startling examples of that teaching put into practice. No man, he said, can carry grudges against his brother. Before going to God in prayer, or presenting gifts at the altar, we need to examine our con-

science. Should there be unresolved grievances, on either side, Jesus said, "...go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5: 23-34)



Clearly, for those who would follow Christ, reconciliation was a given.

Francis of Assisi saw reconciliation as central to his mission and ministry.

As a young man searching for meaning in his life, Francis began by seeking reconciliation with God. That freed him to hear God's call to the historically significant ministry that became his vocation.

Francis even made reconciliation with one's neighbors a condition for entrance into the Order, brothers or sisters.

It was St. Bonaventure who styled St. Francis a "messenger of peace." And so he was. But he was also an instrument, even a channel of reconciliation, a hallmark of peace of any kind. That's why people saw in Francis the Lord's gifts of peace and joy.

Like Francis, we Christians today are called to be reconcilers, with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the best of all preparations.

[Of note, The Feast of St. Francis, October 4, this year falls on the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, with the Sunday Mass taking preference.] ■

ST. PEREGRINE: BE WILLING TO TRUST IN OTHERS

With one brief statement, Our Lord defined trust in human relationships and in our life with God. “Fear is useless,” he said. “What is needed is trust.” (Mark 5:36)

The Lord had spoken in gentle reprimand to the servants of a local synagogue official named Jarius. That distraught father of a 12-year-old girl pushed his way through a crowd to reach Jesus and beg for his help. “My little daughter is critically ill. Please come and lay your hands on her so that she may get well and live.”

Almost in embarrassment, members of his household tried to dismiss the plea of this heart-broken father. “Your daughter is dead,” they counseled, and such requests of “the Teacher” were worthless. (Mark 5: 21-43)

We know the outcome. Jesus heard and honored the request of this faith-filled father. The little 12-year-old girl was restored to life and full health. Her “welcome” back-to-life began with Jesus’ command to her joyful parents: Give her “something to eat.”

St. Peregrine, a good friend for so many of us, has to rank among the most devoted of Christ’s disciples down the ages. This 14th Century religious order priest is said to have given every moment of his religious and priestly vocation to the Lord’s service. Hence, he had many occupations: confessor, educator, great preacher, worker among God’s poor. He became a healer as well, spending many hours in the hospitals of the

day, both in counseling as a chaplain as well as pitching in to help serve the sick.

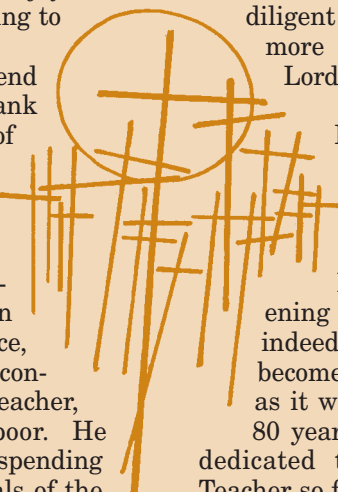
Of special interest to him in this age of plagues, war after war, and pervasive superstition, were the poor and the abandoned, suffering in those hospitals.

It would be his own serious illness that emerged as a turning point for Fr. Peregrine. A sore on his own foot and leg would not heal. When it was diagnosed as a cancer, he submitted to the medical science of his day. With his religious superiors in agreement with the doctors, Peregrine resigned himself to amputation of his leg.

Then he did what many of us who trust in God would do: he prayed, trusting in God’s love and providential care. St. Peregrine spent the night before his scheduled surgery in the monastery chapel, prostrate in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

And we know how that story ended: A miracle. His leg was completely healed. A miracle that freed up this diligent priest for some 40 years more of faithful service to the Lord and God’s people.

We often ask St. Peregrine’s help, especially for cancer patients – family members, friends, or our own concerns. But we can ask none better than Peregrine for help in deepening our own trust in God. Ask indeed, that trust in the Lord will become as much a part of our lives as it was for Peregrine during his 80 years on earth – most of them dedicated to serving his Lord and Teacher so faithfully. ■



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,

During this time of year the leaves begin to change and the weather cools. Children shake off summer freedoms and settle into the routine of school again. It is time for all of us to welcome Fall. Fall happens to be one of my favorite seasons but even if it weren't, I would gladly accept the changes necessary to see God's planet in its golden and red-hued splendor.

September is also a time to reflect upon Jesus's mother Mary, whose birth we celebrate on the 8th. How often have we heard the story of the teen who without question welcomed the challenges of marriage and the responsibility of bringing up the son of God? Mary's example is one we can take to heart as parents, educators and as religious.

How many times a day do we hear ourselves saying no to God? No God. I am too busy to pray. No God. I cannot make it to church this weekend. No God. I cannot change how I am acting even if it contradicts what your Son Jesus showed us. No...No...No. It can become too much of a pattern. How about reversing that, slowly at first if necessary, with an eye toward building a better relationship with God.

When God offers you a challenge, instead of hesitating, think of Mary, a young girl who opened her heart, mind and soul to the Lord. Envision her now in Heaven with Christ. Pray to her when you are in need of spiritual nourishment and strength.

Practice saying yes to God. Yes I will follow you. Yes I will lead the way so others may see and hear you. And yes I will reach out to those less fortunate to give of myself and walk with them into your kingdom.

May God's blessings be with you and yours,

Fr. Robert, OFM

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

DEAR FRIENDS,

By Fr. Antonio, O.F.M.

No matter how many times you might have visited the missions, going back is always a moving experience.

On a recent visit, I left early in the morning to be at the airport on time to board a plane that was to take off at 6:00 a.m. - destination Guatemala. I escorted a team of U.S. doctors, Dr. Mack Cheney, Professor at Harvard, Dr. Tessa Hadlock, surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital and Dr. Vito Quantela, from Rochester University to our Franciscan hospital, Obres Sociales Santo Hermano Pedro in the city of Antigua, Guatemala. The doctors' were exploring the possibility of offering their professional service as facial reconstruction surgeons a couple of weeks a year. The hospital has many children with faces disfigured by cleft palate and other facial malformations. The whole project was organized and financed by Carmela Kletjian a good friend and generous benefactor of our Franciscan missions who traveled with us along with our mutual friend Lilly Saravo.

After a five hour flight we landed in Guatemala City and by 11:00 a.m. we had already reached the Antigua hospital. We were warmly welcomed by the medical and administrative staff who, along with one of our confreres, Hermano Franciso gave us an exhaustive tour of the hospital wards and its facilities. Our U.S. doctors were impressed with the organization of the hospital remarking how much it had accomplished with such modest means.

Above all, it is obvious that it is more than a hospital. You have the impression of visiting a vast family of people of every age and condition who care for the sick





and the permanent residents with a great deal of love and compassion. There are permanent residents who have spent 20 years or more in a place that has become their home. Abandoned children with heavy challenges are taken care of until they die, because they can not be discharged since no one will claim them.

The saddest case we witnessed this time is that of an abandoned nine-year-old child who was found by a U.S. citizen from Washington State who works in Guatemala. When this child was taken to the hospital he weighed less than 20 pounds. After a couple of months of intense care his weight reached 30 pounds. He was still unable to walk or talk and his big eyes wandered around still filled with apprehension and fear. When we visited we saw the gentleman who found him had the child on his lap and was feeding him with the same kind of bottle used for infants.

The deep pain caused by these outrageous conditions of so many poor who lack the basics to survive is balanced, somehow, by the incredible outpouring of love on the part of so many good hearts who do a tremendous amount of good without fanfare. Our doctors pledged to volunteer their professional services of a couple of weeks on a yearly basis.

The following day we visited Guatemala City stopping at the city hospital where there is an impressive cardiac ward founded by Dr. Castaneda from Guatemala. Born more than 80 years ago, he spent most of his life in the U.S. where he was a famous heart surgeon. His dream was to create in his homeland a good cardiac ward that could offer the same advanced level of care we have in our own country. We were told that the mortality rate at that cardiac ward is lower than some areas in the United States – evidence of the miracle of love.

Our last stop was at the beautiful modern orphanage, Valley of the Angels, founded and still directed by Fr. Rocco, a friar from Boston who many years later is still filled with energy and enthusiasm. At the orphanage more than 270 children from grades one through nine live and study. Their happiness there, surrounded by the care and love of the friars, sisters and instructors who share every moment with them, is very contagious. Fr. Rocco's philosophy is "the best for the poorest." Fr. Michael, a young friar from Boston, assigned to the orphanage about a month ago welcomed us and introduced us to the children. He gave us a tour of the facilities before inviting us to sit at his Franciscan table to share a simple meal with him.

Thanks to some generous parishioners and friends from Boston and Toronto, I was able to leave a monetary gift at both places. I wish to invite you to keep our Franciscans among your favorite charities. I assure you that if you could see how your money is spent, you would be proud of every penny you are able to share with our missionaries. May God bless and reward you for all the good you do for others. ■

REAL ANGELS SHAPE ST. VERONICA'S CHURCH

By Fr. Guy, O.F.M.

Fr. Guy, O.F.M. tells how generosity and devotion built a new house of God



I've often heard that converts make great Catholics. I will tell you a story that may just prove that to be true. Four years ago a middle-aged man came up to me and said, "Father I want you to say five masses for me. Every time you visit church I want you to say a mass for me." I said I would and when the man left the catechist who was with me told me the stranger's name. As if sent from God, his name was Angel and he was a new convert.

His whole family embraced Catholicism after they met with people from the new evangelization program; where catechists go out in the community, preach the gospel and invite people to join the church.

Angel is slight but is an efficient farmer. He likes to plant everything and gets a good return on his crops. His favorite vegetable is soybean – mine too.

Our Angel has become a close friend. He gives me 25 lb. bags of soybeans for my use because he knows how much I enjoy them. He is a poor person but his heart is big. He struggles very hard to support his wife and five children.

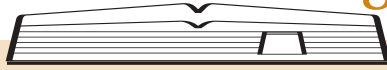
Not too long ago Angel said, "Padrecito (an affectionate way to say Father) I want to donate a piece of land next to my house, with the condition that you build a chapel or small church there." The area needed a chapel and without any hesitation I said, "Ok Angel – If it is God's will." But I said, "The land you are giving me is on a slight hill." He said, "Father we will level it off and you can build."

Shortly after that I went to the States for my vacation. I visited the Franciscan Mission Associates and told the director we had land, but needed help funding a chapel. In no time flat she came up with a benefactor who would donate a chapel or small church. The chapel is named after that generous benefactor, Veronica.

Back in El Salvador, Angel and his family leveled a good sized hill with lots of gravel and stone. Neighbors pitched in with more converts joining and making light of back breaking work. Angel and his family cleared the land, the benefactor arrived and the small church was erected. Soon the glorious space will be blessed by the bishop.

I thank God for his many blessings of grace and love. This story is evident that with His support good-willed people can do great things, like literally moving mountains of stone, all for the honor and glory of God and our Blessed Mother. ■

Words Worth Noting



Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.

G.K. Chesterton

I have lived to thank God that all my prayers have not been answered.

Jean Ingelow

Great minds have purposes, others have wishes.

Washington Irving

Service to others is the rent you pay for living on this earth.

Marian Wright Edelman

A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.

Benjamin Franklin

One filled with joy preaches without preaching.

Mother Theresa

It is the function of perfection to make one know one's imperfection.

Saint Augustine

A daydreamer is prepared for most things.

Joyce Carol Oates

Work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

Vaclav Havel

Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Father Robert,

In gratitude for all your prayers and good works and favors received from St. Christopher, St. Blaise, St. Lucy and St. Anthony, I am enclosing a check for \$25.00. May God grant abundant blessings on the Missions and the people they serve.

Sincerely,
A.V.
Monroeville, PA

Dear Fr. Robert,

Please publish my thanks to St. Jude, St. Therese, St. Joseph and St. Anthony for prayers answered. I am so very grateful and I pray for continued health for my daughter. I am sending a donation of \$20.00. Thank you and God bless.

P.Z.
Phoenix, AZ

Dear Father Robert,

Please accept my offering in thanksgiving to St. Anthony. I prayed to this wonderful saint (and others) nine Tuesdays in succession and believe he was the saint who hears my prayers to obtain a new job, a job which would allow me to devote more time to my family and to begin a new career.

I am eternally grateful to you, St. Anthony.

L.M.R.
Monmouth Beach, NJ

Dear Father Robert,

Please publish 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 Glens Falls, NY

Dear Father Robert,

I would like to thank St. Jude for granting me many, many favors over the years. During the last family crisis I promised him I would have a thank you printed in his name. One time he answered my prayer in only one day's time. My son-in-law needed a job and I started a novena the night before and the next day he received a job after that is just one instance of how powerful prayers to St. Jude are. Also I would like to thank St. Anthony and Our Blessed Mother for answering my many petitions over many years.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
C.B.
Harbor Beach, MI

THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

Know some people who hate November? Many find it such a somber month. Stark, leafless trees silhouetted against gray skies... damp-chilled winds... withered leaves crackling under foot, so many reminders that all things come to an end, and die.

And here comes November on our Church Calendar. Both the first and second days of the month are devoted to issues of death.

1) All Saints, celebrated on November 1, honors not just the great canonized saints, but all those who moved from life in this world, to eternal happiness with God.

2) The next day, November 2, is celebrated as All Souls Day and it hits home. Always. For on this day we honor all the faithful departed... including our own beloved deceased.

In effect, both Feasts, looking death in the eye, see triumph coming from loss. For Our Lord, Jesus, taught us that death is not the end. Rather, the passage way to life eternal with the loving Father who created us.

Yet, when it comes to the loss of our own loved ones, death and dying combine for a bitter cup of tea – as some ethnic groups would have it. Whatever time of year, death brings around ‘November days’ of loss, sorrow, mourning.

And we are not alone. Our Lord, God-Man, Jesus Christ, experienced the pain of death with its vacuum of loss, sorrow,

and tears. The Gospels show us Jesus weeping and mourning the death of his friend, Lazarus (Luke 11:33-44); and for his murdered cousin, John the Baptizer (Matthew 14: 12-14).

We can look also at the Franciscan friars and nuns who “lost” Francis and Clare in this world. Their inconsolable sorrow pours out into their writings. “All our consolation departs with you,” we read. “Who will comfort us in our great poverty? Who will console us in our trials? You were our helper in the troubles.”

These men and women, schooled in the Gospel, needed the same things we do to get us through death and mourning. The time-honored combination of faith and trust in God.

And we should never forget to seek the help of St. Joseph, Patron of a happy death. It was Joseph who taught the boy, Jesus, how to experience mourning and to find healing. Surely, Joseph taught that remarkable Child Jesus everything he knew about the importance of faith and prayer in times of mourning.

He will surely help us to heal in the same way. Pray that one day the beloved we hold up to God in prayer may welcome us when we journey home to God.

[A note: All Saints falls on the 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time this year. But the Church holds this day as so important that the Readings and Liturgy for the Feast take the place of that Sunday’s readings.] ■

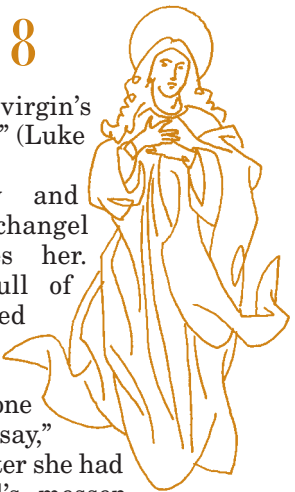
ST. ANTHONY’S BREAD

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 192, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

Mary's Birthday: September 8



Popularly known as “Our Lady’s Birthday,” the Feast of Mary’s Nativity is celebrated on September 8. That is exactly nine months to the day of the Solemn Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8. No accident, because the feasts are closely related. Here is how and why:

- The great Holy Day of December 8 marks God’s unique gift to Mary. In view of her role in God’s plan to be mother of the Redeemer, Christ’s mission as Redeemer applied to Mary, even before her birth. She would enter the world, full of grace.

As *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes note, the early Fathers of the Eastern Church saluted Mary, the Mother of God as “the All-Holy.” They believed that Mary remained “free of every personal sin her whole life long.”

And that is what Pope Pius IX taught when he proclaimed the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854.

“The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception... preserved immune from all stain of original sin.”

This gift came, the Pope explained, via “a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race.”

- Now, then, we can “fast forward” in time, but backwards on the calendar, to September 8; marking the celebration of Mary’s Birth. A wonderful and joyful feast, for Mary’s birth in this world sets into motion God’s long-awaited promise of the Redeemer, the Messiah.

All that would be needed is the free decision of the young woman whom we meet in the Gospel account. She is described as “a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of

David. The virgin’s name was Mary.” (Luke 1:26-27)

The mighty and fearsome Archangel Gabriel salutes her. “Hail, Mary, full of grace... Blessed are you among women.”

“Let it be done to me as you say,”

Mary replied, after she had questioned God’s messenger, opening her life to God’s will. All the young woman’s natural fears were snuffed out by Mary’s faith. Likewise, by her experience of the presence of the Loving God, a singular grace Mary experienced long before she could remember how or why.

So Mary’s joyful heart welcomed God’s invitation... and God’s plan of Salvation, could be set in motion, at last.

Tradition tells us that Mary was born in Jerusalem. Her father was called Joachim, and her mother, Anne. In the 12th Century, Christians who researched Mary’s childhood built the Church of St. Anne to mark the childhood home of the Mother of God. That beautiful church became a favorite of pilgrims, then and now. A reminder of Mary’s unique destiny from that day of her birth to her role in Heaven, even today.

This Feast of Mary’s Nativity, kept today on September 8 and celebrated years before the 7th Century dawned, invites our prayer today. Pray that we can keep our eyes and heart centered on Mary’s Son, our Lord and Savior, just as His Holy Mother did. ■

EXERCISE: GOOD FOR BODY, MIND, SPIRIT

Some 2,000 years ago, St. Paul knew how to get the attention of people in the leisure and sports-mad Roman Empire. He chose athletes as the symbol of excellence and personal sacrifice in view of achieving goals. For it mirrored the kind of effort needed to be a spiritual athlete, a true disciple of Jesus and his Gospel.

And so, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul challenged them.

Look to your favorite athletes, he implored. They train till they drop. They sacrifice whatever is necessary. Just to win the prize. And what a prize: "...a crown of leaves that withers."

"But we," Paul wrote, speaking Christian-to-Christian, need to be working just as hard – for a far greater prize, "a crown that is imperishable" (1 Cor 9:24-27).

A memorable shape-up letter, indeed. One that hits home just as hard today. For the athletic life, the need to keep fit, is today's icon.

Ads, TV programs, magazine articles all speak to keeping fit. We are advised to go to a gym... eat healthful foods (and in smaller portions)... walk, walk, walk (a fitness exercise that costs nothing, so no excuse, thank you). Other fitness ads reference the mind: work at puzzles, take courses, learn new musical instruments, keep contact with friends. And again, walk-walk-walk. It helps the mind as well as the body.

As to keeping our spiritual lives fit today: we are lucky. Look up and look around. Opportunities abound to grow in our relationship with God.

† The local parish is a good place to start. This time of year, the bulletin begins to preview fall events and programs – open to all interested.

† All encourage parishioners to prepare for Sunday Mass by getting

familiar with the Readings, God's Word and message to us. Most bulletins list both Sunday and Daily readings. The idea: Take time before coming to Mass to read, and more than that, to pray with God's Holy Word. You don't even need to go out of the house to do this.

† Look for opportunities for a yearly retreat, with many scheduled in autumn months, usually offering better driving and traveling weather than winter or spring.

† Some parishes have a well-stocked library. Here you can expect audio and visual programs, books and magazines, all offering help from experts.

† Look for the great devotions in the parish, as well as at local shrines, retreat centers, houses of prayer and at Catholic colleges. See what calls out to you as an invitation from the Lord: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament... novenas... feast days of the great saints... lecture and adult learning options.

This kind of exercise will keep you growing, keep you fit (Body, Mind, Spirit). And it will enrich your life. The Holy Spirit awaits... with encouragement and God's grace. ■

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 191,
Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

Special Novena Schedule Fall 2009

All year round Franciscan Mission Associates conducts a regular schedule of spiritual and devotional exercises in which benefactors are invited to take part. During the Fall the Special Novena schedule is:

September 2-10/11-19St. Jude Novena
September 21-29Feast of St. Michael
September 26-October 4Feast of St. Francis (in Assisi)
September 29-October 7Our Lady of the Rosary
October 7-October 15Our Lady of the Rosary
October 27-December 229 Tuesdays before Christmas
in honor of St. Anthony of Padua

All Franciscan Mission Associates, sponsors, and benefactors are asked to join in prayer for the intentions and petitions of those taking part in the exercises. Please pray also for our Franciscan missionaries, for the people they serve, for an increase in vocations and for all our associates. Holy Mass is offered each day for all benefactors and for the intentions they request. Kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

Father Robert, O.F.M., Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 194, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

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