

FMA

FOCUS



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

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Virtue: HOPE

Hope is not so easy to define as its sister “theological virtues,” faith and charity. Yet, God’s gift of hope is there for us when we need it most.

Soon, in our Readings at Mass, we once again meet King Herod – a man who tried to kill hope. Plunged into his own inner darkness, he slaughtered every male infant or toddler who might be the promised Savior.

At the same time, another man, Joseph the carpenter, held on to hope. Alert to the times, yet ever waiting on God’s promise... this so-precious Holy Child... the hope of his own people and the people of ages yet to dawn.

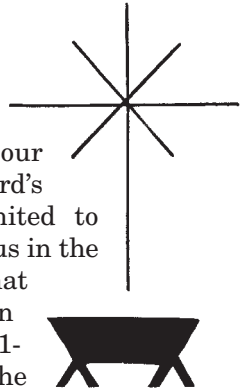
And so the flame of hope flickers in our souls, ready to keep us on course – however our days in this world may challenge us. ■

Awaiting the Lord’s Coming

As Christians, our waiting on the Lord’s coming is not limited to Christmas. For Jesus in the Gospel promises that he will come again “in glory” (Mt. 25: 31-46). So each year the Church asks us to recall the Lord’s return; it is chief focus on the very last Sunday of the church year: the Feast of “Our Lord, Jesus Christ, the King” (this year, Nov. 22).

Listen to the Readings, with deep attention to powerful images of the Second Reading: “Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him...” (Rev. 1: 5-8). Indeed, the whole liturgy calls us to be watchful... lest we be surprised, unprepared for the Lord’s coming again.

As the new church year dawns on the first Sunday of Advent (this year, Nov. 29), the Readings at Mass again



connect the hope of Christ's first coming to this world, and the promise of His return, not as an infant, but as the Alpha and the Omega, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8)

It is the season of hope.

Among the first things our scholarly and pastoral Pope Benedict XVI set about following his election to the papacy was to ask us all to look at the theological virtues: faith, hope and charity.

Beginning with Christmas 2005, the Pope began his series, with the encyclical letter on charity (Christian love). Followed, in April of 2006, with an encyclical on faith ("Jesus of Nazareth"). And as Advent dawned in late November of 2007, the Pope published "Spe Salvi" (Saved by Hope).

These virtues, hope, in particular, were on the Holy Father's mind again, when he made both a visit and a personal pilgrimage to the Holy Land, earlier this year (May, 2009).

In Jerusalem, at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Pope Benedict urged his listeners (and all of us) to hold on to hope in these troubled times.

"The Gospel reassures us that God can make all things new, that history need not be repeated, that memories can be healed... that a future of justice, peace, prosperity and cooperation can arise..."

Pray during this holy season for the flowering of hope in human hearts worldwide. And pray especially, that the Holy Infant finds a waiting heart, a welcoming heart – your welcoming heart – this Christmas. ■

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 2010 and in a Special 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 remail 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. 292, Mount Vernon, NY 10551



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Christmas Today in Story and Song

“Noooo!” That’s the loud lament you hear from some people when “it” comes around again. That would be the 24/7 “All Christmas Music Format” on many radio stations. Likewise, the return of “classic” Christmas movies, made-for-TV holiday films, or “specials.”

The Church, in the meantime, sings the *first ever Christmas song*, daily, worldwide – not just 24/7 for a season. It is Mary’s “Magnificat,” the Gospel Canticle (Song) for Evening Prayer. With her heart filled with joy, Mary updated a thousand-year-old biblical song attributed to Hannah, the mother of the powerful Prophet, Samuel (1 Samuel 2: 1-10). Then her only child, her ‘miracle boy,’ the toddler Samuel was left by Hannah to be raised by the priests, as her gift to God. In his old age, Samuel was the prophet anointed a teenage shepherd named David – He whose lineage, God chose for the promised Savior.

“*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,*” Mary sings. “*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior...*” (Luke 1: 46-55).

Back in our own time... many enjoy the Christmas music, films, “specials.” Old classics like “Miracle on 34th Street” or “White Christmas”.... Or the newer “carols” like: “Mary’s Boy Child, Jesus Christ” (of African and Caribbean origin), or “Mary, Did You Know...” (country-western). Many people believe such popular holiday favorites inspire good will toward all. And they cite clothing



and food drives, collections to help the needy elderly, telethons and fund raising “parties” to benefit medical research.

“*God who is mighty has done great things for me,*” **Mary’s Song continues, everyday** “...*holy is his name.*”

Even the holiday music and media that appear to “debunk” Christmas can make a positive contribution. For they point out the absence of Christmas spirit – in a culture seemingly short on faith and spirituality. Witness the resurgence of a “holiday” tune with the ring of the 1940’s: “I want a hippopotamus for Christmas...” (a child nagging, with pure-closed door selfishness). Or that other “humorous” holiday tune: “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” (spotlighting a family stapled together by laziness, gluttony, and numb hopelessness – poor Grandma!).

“*He has confused the proud... raised the lowly to high places... to the hungry he has given every good thing...*”

The Christmas season is not about music or media schedules. Rather, it’s all about the wonder of God’s promise and gift – the coming of Christ the Lord. If the media reflects a different tone, well, some would ask, what are we doing about it?

“...*ever mindful of his mercy... even as he promised our fathers... Abraham and his children forever.*” **So ‘Mary’s Song’ of God’s Gift resounds, every evening, every day, all year. ■**



THE EXAMPLE OF ST. FRANCIS: 800 YEARS AND COUNTING...

As Christmas time came to Greccio, Italy, in the Year 1223, Francis of Assisi was 42 years old, in declining health and largely retired from the day to day leadership of his group of followers. But even winter's cold, blowing in over the hills of Greccio, could not chill that heart-aflame, burning within him.

Those who looked back would see the origins of the Friars Minor as a ragged looking band of just a dozen friars. Yet just a decade and a half later, Francis was the spiritual heart of this new kind of religious order, now numbering into the thousands. And its ministries were moving into all parts of the known world.

Everything was bound together with the brief "Rule" Francis had written, a way of life focused on the Lord Jesus, His Gospel, and His Church. That Rule was given verbal approval by Pope Innocent III on April 16 of 1209.

Now Francis had again asked and received Rome's permission for a particular ministry. This time: an outdoor Christmas Mass at Greccio, with a "living Gospel" and a living stable or crèche, peopled and staffed by villagers – including shepherds and their flocks.

And so it was that local people helped build a stable, even stocking it with their own animals. On Christmas Eve, friars from throughout the region led a candle and torch-lit procession of area residents up the hill toward the

hermitage and the world's first "living" Christmas crèche.

All heard Francis, robed as a deacon, sing the Gospel and preach the homily. And yes, watched him lean down to kiss the crib and the little doll who represented Baby Jesus. At the crèche, neighbors and family took on "roles" which real men and women had lived so long ago in Bethlehem.

It was the Holy Night when the largely poor and over-worked people of Greccio experienced the Gospel coming to life. The living crèche touched their own lives and spotlighted their own true dignity – as brothers and sisters of the Holy Infant born in Bethlehem. They saw the Son of God who came into the world as a flesh and blood person – like themselves, Jesus the Lord who conquered death – and lived with them still. A Holy Night. A living Gospel.

Now, some 800 years later, the custom of the stable or crèche at Christmas time is a worldwide favorite. A gift to us all.

T

In his greeting to the "Franciscan Family" attending the April 2009 International "Chapter of Mats," Pope Benedict XVI offered prayers of thanksgiving. First, he thanked God for the safe journeys experienced by the unique spiritual family attending this historic 800th Anniversary Chapter.

Then, with reference to all the men and women – clergy, religious, laity –

tracing their heritage to St. Francis, Pope Benedict offered another prayer: “As Pastor of the whole Church, I want to thank God for the precious gift that you, yourselves, are for the Christian people in its entirety.”

Their common heritage was summed up by Pope Benedict, quoting St. Francis. He cited the opening statement of the historic “Rule.”

“The Rule and the Life of the Friars Minor is this, that is, to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is St. Francis, himself, even today, “a living Gospel,” evident in the lives of thousands of Franciscans worldwide, who is “capable of attracting to Christ men and women of every epoch,” the Pope said, “especially young people who prefer radicalism to half measures.”

Asking the prayerful intercession of St. Francis, the Holy Father prayed that Franciscans “will continue to offer themselves completely to the service of others, especially the poor.”

T

Here are the latest statistics on the size and breadth of the Franciscan family.

More than half a million (650,000) Franciscans are serving the Lord in 110 countries. ■

FATHER FRANCIS ELECTED GENERAL DEFINITOR

At left, Provincial Minister of the Immaculate Conception Province, Fr. Robert Campagna, O.F.M., congratulates Fr. Francis Walter, O.F.M., the

newly-elected General Definitor for the Order’s English-speaking Franciscans.

He was elected during the General Chapter held in Assisi, Italy, May 24-June 20, 2009. Based in Rome, Fr. Francis is one of nine definitors (counselors), each at the service of Franciscans in specific geographical areas, or of particular language groupings.

A native of New Jersey, Fr. Francis has been working in Rome since 2005 in the Secretariat serving the Vatican’s Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. At the Province’s Formation House in Rome, he was also Director of Formation and Studies, and Director of Temporary Professed Friars.

Making his Solemn Profession in 1976, and ordained to the priesthood in 1977, Fr. Francis served the Province in parish ministries, as well in



Provincial administrative formation programs.

“We rejoice with him and our prayers are with him,” Fr. Robert said, “as he takes up this new ministry to our Franciscan fraternity.”

[Incorporated into these statistics above are the present numbers for The Immaculate Conception Province: 163 Friars; 4 Bishops; 127 priests; 2 permanent deacons; 20 brothers; and 10 friars in temporary vows.]

BUILDING ON THE CROWDED CHURCHES OF CHRISTMAS

How many times has any one of us invited someone to come with us to Mass on Sunday? Perhaps for Christmas?

Many Catholic people say they are loathe to “pry” in such matters. Likely for the same reasons, others will say it’s just “too hard.”

In fact, however, a friendly invitation is not prying. At the Ascension, the Lord made it clear that doing “God’s work” is up to us. And secondly, doing so is not hard. Today, there are so many natural opportunities to extend an invitation. It can be as simple as...

- A friendly greeting to everyone we encounter at Mass, especially to those new people who may wonder how welcome they truly are.
- An invitation to holiday events at church... especially for neighbors and family members who might find it hard to get there. And don’t forget the seasonal suppers or parties or choir events.
- A cordial invitation to ‘days of recollection,’ and Advent Scripture Study or faith sharing sessions.
- A loving, no-questions-asked invitation to family members who may have been away from the Church for a long time. Many need just a simple “invite” to begin going back and feeling at home on a regular basis.
- And especially during the Christmas season... we can make room

for someone seeking a seat... genuinely welcome people who are new – as well as those we see on a regular basis.

- Then, introduce yourself, and introduce new people to others.

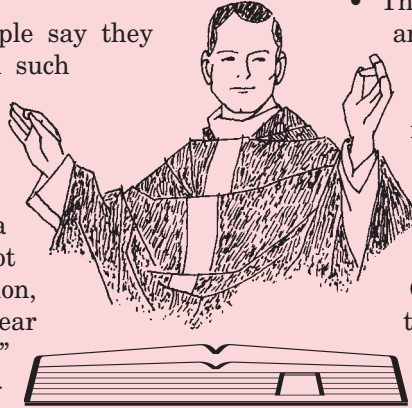
And what if you receive a rebuke for your effort, perhaps never see the new person again? Prayer is the answer – and our Christian obligation. It is the essential first step; the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest.

All are classic ways to welcome the “new people... the strangers... the visitors.” To let them see the welcoming presence of the living God shining forth from those privileged to share God’s Holy Word and Sacraments.

So, rather than being haunted by those ghosts of lost opportunities, give Christian courtesy a try this season, especially at Advent and Christmas Masses. With the Holy Spirit as guide, working for God gets easier every time you try it. ■

Hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

St. Paul, Romans 5: 5



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,

Everything seems much more crowded around Christmas time, including the pews at church. A woman I know used to grumble about the “holiday” churchgoers, as she called them.

Charlotte would complain every year about the multitudes dressed in finery filling up parking lots and churches on holidays. Last year, though, she approached me after Christmas Mass wearing a smile instead of a grimace.

A change had come over her, a sense of peace I had not seen in years past. It seems mine was not the only ear she bent; her father also was told of these interlopers and his advice was, “Move over for these people, perhaps if they saw a seat at church they might come more often.”

Charlotte dismissed her father as too kindhearted – but then something happened. He died right before Christmas last year. In her grief, she told me, she saw with new eyes those strangers taking up room at Mass as fellow Christians, like Joseph and Mary looking for a room at the inn.

Instead of turning them out, Charlotte made room in her pew, and her heart. She understood that for those infrequent churchgoers God’s love, and that of the wonderful Christian community, might just make all the difference.

We can all take something away from Charlotte’s story. This Advent season honor her father and our Holy Father by becoming more welcoming and open to the newcomers and returning souls in the crowded churches. What a beautiful and blessed Christmas present indeed.

May God bless you and yours during this joyful Advent season,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Robert, ofm". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

THE U TAKES SHAPE



One evening I was working in my office attempting to catch up on some paperwork. There was a knock on the door and I answered to discover a small group of parishioners, mostly men. They came with an inquiry. "Bishop, is it possible to begin a Catholic University in Juticalpa?" It didn't take me long to respond because just shortly before the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, who inaugurated the first Catholic University in Honduras, invited his fellow bishops to open regional campuses of the National Catholic University in their respective diocese.

Of course the idea intrigued me. Structural changes in the third world will only occur when educational attitudes and methodology change. Constructive change will only come through higher education. However the social reality of a rural diocese one-fourth the size of Honduras quickly brings one to his senses. Most young people do not have a secondary much less higher education. Most families live in extreme poverty and cannot afford a private education. My response to my night visitors, "It would be great, but I don't think we could attract enough students."

"Yes we will," they insisted. "All of us, and there are many more like us, make sacrifices to send our children to the Capital to study. But times are changing. In



the first place we really do not want our children to leave home. You always worry about them in the city. Secondly, with the high cost of living we simply cannot afford to pay room and board in Tegucigalpa. In fact, the monthly tuition of the Catholic University is less than what we pay for room and board."

The parents certainly made sense. To have their children in the security of their homes and to pay less to educate them in times of economic stress would be appealing to many. And then I thought about so many young people I knew who work in the banks and businesses of Juticalpa. Many of whom did study one or two years in the city, but had to leave college to work and support their families. Without doubt we would have a substantial night enrollment. "Hey," I said, "I think you people have come up with something. Why don't we go to the Catholic University in Tegucigalpa and see what they have to offer us."

After that things began to happen in a hurry. The rector of the Catholic University set down academic and administrative guidelines. A committee was formed in Juticalpa, made up of interested parents chaired by Fr. Dick Donahue, a Boston priest, missionary and educator. They gave talks to Church groups, visited high schools, met with parents of neighboring towns and fostered a very successful radio campaign. Things were coming together. The Board of the National Catholic University approved our petition. There was still a long way to go. The most difficult task was to fulfill the requirements of the Governments board of University Education. They required a first year student body of at least 40 students, a local faculty of certified and qualified teachers, provisional facilities and a four-year plan to establish permanent facilities.

Of course funding was a reality which was not overlooked. This was not our first major endeavor. You can not be a mission-

er for thirty-four years and not know how to raise funds: international agencies, parish appeals, mission clubs, donations from friends, local resources. It doesn't hurt to have a Franciscan view of money: just something that gets in the way of doing the real work of evangelization. I still remember when the Archbishop congratulated me for accepting his offer to begin a regional campus in the diocese. He asked, "How much funding do you have?" I took out my wallet, opened it and at the time it had \$82.00. I answered, "I have \$82.00."

Just fifteen months after that quiet evening sitting at my desk and the sudden knock on the door and somehow getting things done in the midst of the fury and confusion of a hurricane, classes began in the gym of the cathedral parish with 42 students.

The "U" as it is called, is now common parlance in the region. Not surprising so in that it is the only university, private or otherwise with a full charter to operate in an area half the size of Honduras. Students, parents and administration decided to emphasize courses in industrial engineering and business administration in agricultural related industries.

It is a wonderful experiment, a pilot project of the Church in Latin America, to create and build a university on a cow pasture along a dirt road two miles out of town. It is a viable alternative to traditional public education by raising academic standards in a community environment of small classes and personal attention. It is the beginning of the challenge to provide leaders immersed in Christian and human values, determined to break the chains of poverty that shackled this region for centuries. It is the vision to insure that the students are prepared to collaborate with their peers in the high-tech global village.

Most Rev. Maurus Muldoon, OFM. DD
Bishop of Juticalpa ■

REHABILITATING LIVES IN OLANCHO

By Fr. Albert, O.F.M.



The Catholic Church of the diocese of Olancho has officially handed over the keys of a brand new prison to the president of Honduras. After two years of hard work, the spacious complex designed to house more than 800 inmates was ready to receive the 427 prisoners of the State of Olancho. But we never had in mind to just finish the building and forget about it. We always tried to figure out how to change the prison into a true rehabilitation center. And by now I believe that we are on the way to achieving that goal.

Right now three lawyers, active members of our Parish, are studying and

revising each and every inmate's case. In fact, two of the prisoners are already free and back with their families.

We understood the days in prison are long so we made sure there was productive and fruitful work to be done. During our rainy season you can see more than one hundred men actively sowing beans, rice, yucca and corn on the nine acres of land we managed to buy for them right by the prison. Additionally, almost a dozen of the inmates are good carpenters, so we got eight thousand feet of wood that is right now being turned into chairs, tables and benches in the prison workshops.

Most of the men do not know how to read and write. We thought of giving them an education and there is a teacher who gives classes five days a week. Through our benefactors she gets the necessary books, copy books and pencils. It's nice to see a man 40, 50 even 65 trying to figure out the letters that make out his own name.

When we planned the prison, we also thought about the sick. And so now those sick with AIDS and tuberculosis live in their own separate quarters. A doctor visits the infirmary three times a week and we try to get him the necessary medicines.

And the latest? Part of the complex we built consists of a regular basketball court with the correct measurements and right now we have 16 teams battling for a winner's cup which we don't even have yet. We are short on referees but long on skirmishes during the games!

We all understand that it's a long process that needs lots of patience and much Franciscan Love. But Rome and New York were not built in a day? Thanks to you, our benefactors, the new Granja Penal of Olancho is a real beehive of activity and much promise for the future. ■

Words Worth Noting



At first we hope too much; later on, not enough.

Joseph Roux

Give something, however small, to the one in need. For it is not small to one who has nothing. Neither is it small to God, if we have given what we could.

St. Gregory

Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

Pope John Paul II

Success comes before work only in the dictionary.

Anon

The difficult is done at once, the impossible takes a little longer.

Proverbs late 19th century

Spread the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.

St. Francis

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around us in awareness.

James Thurber

Let the past drift away with the water.

Japanese saying

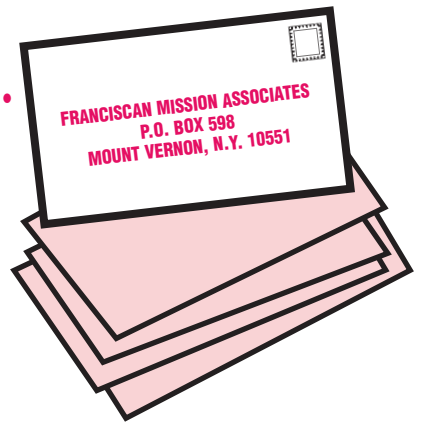
Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.

Calvin Coolidge

The best of all gifts around any Christmas tree: the presence of a happy family all wrapped up in each other.

Burton Hillis

Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Fr. Robert,

My son and daughter-in-law are married over five years and in all that time were trying to have a baby but it just didn't happen. Everyone in the family prayed that they would be blessed with at least one child. My daughter-in-law will be 40 years old this year and wouldn't have too much more time to bear children. They recently shared the good news with us that she is now three months pregnant with twins! We have been doubly blessed!

I promised to offer written thanks to the Sacred Heart, Our Blessed Mother, St. Jude, St. Anthony, St. Joseph, St. Francis, St. Theresa, St. Gerard, St. Anne, St. Elizabeth, St. Padre Pio, St. Mother Theresa and St. Mother Theodore Guerin. As you can see I prayed to almost every saint I knew of and although my favor took awhile in coming, we have been blessed more than I had hoped for. God is never outdone in his generosity!

Enclosed please find a check in thanksgiving for the missions. Please remember my family in your prayers and for a safe delivery of two healthy babies for my daughter-in-law Gladys.

Sincerely,
Dolores Principe

Dear Father Robert,

Each time I receive FMA FOCUS, I am so happy. Believe me, I receive many similar publications, but yours is very special. Why? Because not only does it tell me about the work of the Franciscans, but it is such a spiritual gift and the articles are very enriching to me.

Thank you so much. God bless you and your fellow priests. Hope the next year is a great year for you in every way.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth R. Schrieber

Dear Father,

Could you please include this in your "FMA Focus." Enclosed is a check of \$15.00 in thanksgiving to The Sacred Heart, St. Anthony, St. Jude and the Saints.

Thank you for all your prayers.

Blessings,
W.B
Ephrata, PA

Feasts of the Season

Our Christmas days are filled with now-familiar characters: saints, angels, martyrs, kings, shepherds. They're the rich plum pudding of those hallowed days we consider part of the one great celebration. Here are just three:

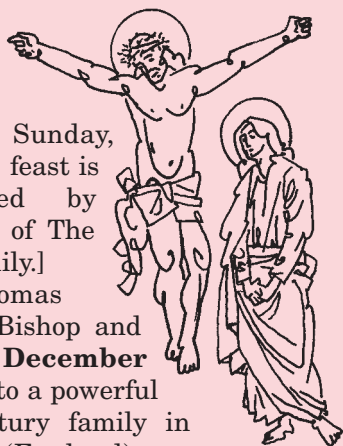
- St. Stephen, the First Christian Martyr, Saturday, **December 26**. Among the first deacons ordained by the Apostles to minister to the early Church in Jerusalem. Listen and learn as he brilliantly proclaims the heritage Jesus left to us all. And hear him, like Jesus, praying for his killers' forgiveness – with his last breath. Indeed a great patron for young adults, especially any “Stephen” in the family. [Try reading the full account – Acts: Chapters 6 and 7. Look for the mystery man among the accusers and killers – someone who returns later in the Acts of the Apostles, after God gives him a miraculous “do-over”.] And please pray for today's Deacons, and those preparing for the diaconate.

- St. John the Evangelist, **December 27**. The youngest of the Apostles, John was a Galilean fisherman by trade, until called by Jesus. We know that the Lord, dying on the cross, entrusted Our Lady to his care. Brilliant, fearless, the mystic of mystics, St. John was the only Apostle to die of old age (in 104 A.D.), preaching, teaching, evangelizing, and writing – the Fourth Gospel, three Epistles, and Revelation. To learn more about him, read and pray with the final Gospel proclaimed on Christmas Day, John 1: 1-18. [Since December 27 falls this

year on Sunday, St. John's feast is superseded by the feast of The Holy Family.]

- Thomas Beckett, Bishop and Martyr, **December 29**. Born to a powerful 12th century family in London (England) on December 21 of 1118, he would be martyred on December 29 of 1170 (some 11 years before St. Francis was born in Assisi, Italy). As a deacon (serving the Archbishop of Canterbury), his brilliance and skills pulled him into the Royal Court, ultimately as Chancellor of England. Yet, God had greater plans. Thomas, was elected, ordained and consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury. From top bureaucrat, to top servant of God in the Realm – a role leading to his murder at the altar that cold December day – a scene reminiscent of murdered bishops in our own times.

Most of us will not be called to witness Jesus as martyrs, as were Saints Stephen and Thomas. Nor do most people live into their late 90's as did St. John the Evangelist. But we must all pray for the grace to know God's will for us. Then, like Jesus emerging from John the Baptizer's baptismal waters in the Jordan, we, too, can be about God's work – making the most of the days God has given us. ■



Visit us on the web
franciscanmissionassoc.org

THE LIVES KNOWN ONLY TO GOD – ALL SAINTS

Just listen to the gusto classic hymns bring to the All Saints Day Mass: “For all the saints who from their labors rest...” The lyrics soar as God’s people salute those wonderful parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Even the ancestors generations back. Those whose stories we have heard at holidays and First Holy Communions and weddings, and of course, at funerals. Those whose love of God took on flesh and blood as they worked hard to care for the life and lives God gave them. Men and women who were the first teachers of the children entrusted to their care, putting faith first on the list of “subjects.”

People bring such “baggage” to the All Saints Day Mass. And this year, the solemnity and holy day falls on Sunday, November 1.

Much of the day’s spirit is likely wrapped within the First Reading. Listen attentively as St. John the Evangelist, in his Book of Revelations, tries to show us the vision God gave him. (Rev 7:2-4, as well as verses 9-14)

“I John, saw another angel...” And thus it begins. The vision includes thousands of people marked with God’s holy seal, people from “every tribe of the children of Israel.”

And yet, more: “After this, I had a vision of a great multitude, which no

one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.” All are robed in white, holding palm branches, and standing before the throne of God, singing praise and glory.

Just one of the powerful images the Church gives us this day, and it is a very important Reading for our times. The specific citations of the saints as people of “every nation, race, people, and tongue” remind us: God calls his children from the whole family of people He created.

We need just open a newspaper or turn on the television news to see how quickly nostalgic ideas of “family” can become exclusive – very different from God’s plan for us. In fact, many national and international conflicts leading to violence, war, genocides can be traced to closed concepts of just who is “family” – on earth or in heaven.

While it is only human to experience resentments that stem from past injustice or even painful events in present day life, our Liturgy reminds us to recall God’s will for his family on earth. Calls us to remember that Jesus came to save “every nation, race, people, and tongue.”

Ask God in this holy season for the grace and gift to grow in love for all our brothers and sisters. ■

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 294, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

RECALLING THE MOTHER OF THE AMERICAS - THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

There have been times when Our Lady speaks up and sets things straight. As she did on December 9, 1531, on a hillside near Mexico City. The area was called Tepeyac in the native Aztec language.

It had been a dozen years since the explorer, Hernan Cortes and the armies of Spanish conquerors had arrived and colonized the region. And already some of the Aztecs had been catechized and baptized by Franciscan Friars. One of them was named Juan Diego.

Mary, with a mother's gentle tones, stopped him as he walked one day near Tepeyac. Dressed in the brilliant colors of the Aztecs, with the sash worn by pregnant Aztec women, Mary identified herself. I am, she said, "the mother of the true God from whom all life has come." She asked for a church to be built there, and entrusted that message for the Bishop to Juan.

It would be two years before construction began. For Bishop Zumarraga said he needed "a sign."

Over the months, Juan was about to give up hope. How could he produce a "sign" the Bishop would find acceptable? Then, Our Lady came through.

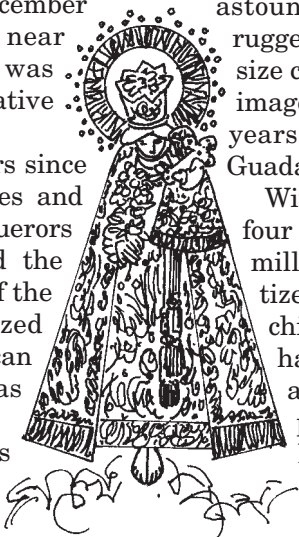
When she spoke with Juan this time, his poncho filled up with the roses she asked him to gather. He did so - although he had never seen such flowers growing on that rocky ground, and surely not in the dead of winter.

As the Bishop stared at Juan's unfurled poncho, both men were astounded. Imprinted on that rugged cactus cloth was a life-size color portrait of the Lady, an image venerated for nearly 500 years now, as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Within seven years of Mary's four appearances to Juan Diego, millions of Aztecs were baptized. That is perhaps Mary's chief message: The "true God" had created the Aztec people, along with the entire world's people, in His image and likeness. They too were God's family.

Dedicated as a shrine in 1709, the Basilica today draws millions of pilgrims.

In 2002, Pope John Paul II canonized Juan Diego. Pray to St. Juan and Our Lady. Pray for the Church's evangelization work today - at home and abroad. ■



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 293,
Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

Special Novena Schedule Advent-Christmas 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 Advent-Christmas season, these Novenas of Masses have been arranged:

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

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 also pray for our Franciscan missionary friars, 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 291, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

Join us on Pilgrimage

Oberammergau Passion Play 2010

An 11-Day Pilgrimage to "The Best of Austria, Germany, & Switzerland" featuring the famous Passion Play

11 Days - May 18-28, 2010

VIENNA • MELK ABBEY • SALZBURG • GARMISCH • LUCERNE

The history of the Oberammergau Passion Play began in 1633. As an outcome to the months of dying and suffering from the plague, the people of the village took a vow to perform the "Play of Suffering, Dying and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ" only once every ten years. 2010 will mark the 41st performance of this extraordinary centuries old tradition. The five-hour performance enacts the story of Jesus, upon his entry into Jerusalem to his death on the Cross and his Resurrection. The famous open-air stage of the Passion Play theatre provides a most dramatic setting for this unique cultural and religious event. We hope you will join us!

Dear Father, Please send information on Pilgrimage to Austria - Germany - Switzerland

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____

Mail to: Pilgrimage Office, Dept. N, P.O. Box 598, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

Tel: 914-664-5604 or 914-664-1747