

Saint Mary

ON THE HILL

CATHOLIC CHURCH



News and Notes from Fr. Jerry

Engaging the World with Faith and Love

Dear Parishioners,

How do you be in the world, but not of the world? We live in a world that has very little time or respect for our religious values. As stewards of God's gracious love, I don't think we can simply "circle the wagons" and withdraw into our own little cloistered environment.

This month's newsletter is filled with the stories of parishioners who engage the world with faith and love. I am blessed to be able to sit down with Dr. John McCormack once a month. I find his quiet wisdom to be of great help as I try to figure out how to be in the world in a sane way. As my spiritual director, Dr. McCormack is able to give me good guidance as I face the challenges of sharing God's love in a crazy and mixed up world. He is a holy man and I would encourage everyone to attend his monthly seminar.

Almost every Sunday that CCD is in session, I am happy to be singing along with Dr. Theresa Christie, as she leads the hymn for our opening prayer session. As a secular Franciscan, she has found a way to be in the world and share her medical skills with those in need. Dr. Christie offers good witness of the importance of finding a group of like-minded people with whom we

can find support and encouragement in living out our faith.

And, Mary Kate Conner offers good witness to the benefits of a Catholic education. Her spiritual maturity both humbles and amazes me. In my late 50s, I am still trying to figure out how my life is meant to connect with the Paschal Mystery. It seems that as a teenager, Mary Kate has already connected to the reality that new life in Christ will involve sacrifice and dying to self. How blessed we are to have this wise young woman lead us into our Lenten practices.

All parents want their children to grow up with a strong sense of values. And many parents do all they can to teach their children what to believe in and what to avoid. But as children grow up and go off to school, parents sometimes have less influence than they would like. As children become more involved with the wider world of school, activities, and friends, the principal and teachers of your child's school take on a greater role in helping to provide or maintain a child's values.

We are blessed to have a parish school where parents can send their children and know that it will be an environment in which their children

Mass Schedule

Sunday, 7:45 a.m., 10:30 a.m.,
12:15 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Monday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. and 5:15 p.m.

Thursday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Friday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Saturday, 9:15 a.m.,
5:00 p.m. (Sunday Vigil)

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Saturday, 3:45-4:45 p.m.

Perpetual Adoration Chapel

Chapel is located at the corner of
Monte Sano and Bellevue.

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Celebrating the Miracle of St. Blase Feast Day, Feb. 3

Every year on Feb. 3, we celebrate the Feast day of St. Blase, bishop and martyr. In remembrance of this great saint, priests at most parishes around the world bless the throats of the faithful at Masses on this feast day.

Year after year, many of us step into line to receive the blessing, yet how many of us know the reason why St. Blase is associated with the blessing of throats? From where did the ritual of placing candles across the throat come?

Though we do not know much about the life of St. Blase, tradition tells us that he was born to wealthy, saintly, Catholic parents. Born in Armenia, he devoted his life to medicine and helping the sick. He was a physician, until he was begged by the people to become their bishop. He was appointed by the Church as bishop of the Diocese of Sebaste.

Around the year 313, when the Roman Emperor Licinius was persecuting the Church, Blase went into some woods where he lived as a hermit among animals that he befriended. One day, a group of hunters found Blase in the woods and seized him. Upon their trip to the governor, they encountered a woman whose pig was being attacked by a wolf. Blase commanded the wolf to leave the pig alone and, upon his command, the pig was freed unharmed. Blase was then taken to prison, where he miraculously healed a boy who was choking to death on a fishbone. While Blase remained in prison, the woman whose pig he had freed brought him two candles to serve as his light so that he could read the Scripture.

It was from the miracle of saving the choking boy that the custom of praying to St. Blase to cure all ailments of the throat was borne. And, so, after still refusing to recant his Christian beliefs, he was suspended from a tree and his flesh was torn with iron combs or rakes.

Blase was then thrown into a lake to drown. To the surprise of his persecutors, he surfaced and walked upon the water, and he invited his persecutors to join him. They should do this, he said, to show the power of their gods. The pagans took him up on his invitation,



and ultimately they were drowned. Blase was then told by an angel to return to dry land to receive martyrdom. He was beheaded on the shore and immediately went to Heaven.

Because of his prison experience and his great reputation as a healer, St. Blase's intercession is invoked for the healing of diseases affecting the throat. The candles that the clergy place upon our throats while blessing them symbolize the candles that enlightened St. Blase's cell as he studied Sacred Scripture — connecting his spiritual life to the physical healing. Let us remember to invoke the intercession of this great healer upon any ailments that might be affecting us, either physical or spiritual — especially those pertaining to the throat.

The blessing of the throats is done by the priest holding two blessed candles near the throat in the form of a cross. The priest says, "Through the merits and intercession of St. Blase, bishop and martyr, may God deliver thee from all diseases of the throat, and preserve thee from every other evil. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Integrating Psychological Principles with Faith Traditions

“Where Psychology Meets Christ”

Parishioner Dr. John McCormack is a psychotherapist and counselor with a clinical psychology background. He is also a man of great faith. So, 20 years ago, when he accepted an invitation to speak to eighth-graders at St. Mary’s School about the relationship between psychology and spirituality, he was inspired to pull these two areas of his life together.



*Dr. McCormack
with his wife, Anne*

“I had a personal need in my own faith to integrate what I did professionally with what I believe spiritually,” he says. “I became very excited at that time about how much of a convergence there was between psychological science and the teachings of Christ and His Church, and I really wanted to highlight these, not only for my own faith, but also just to strengthen the faith of others.

“Historically, most of us thought of psychology and faith as contradicting forces. Traditionally, they had been at odds with each other for most of the 20th century. So it was exciting when, as the 20th century came to a close, experts from both groups were understanding that they weren’t really adversarial in what they were learning, teaching, and asking people to accept.”

Dr. McCormack began the “Where Psychology Meets Christ” ministry in 1998. This monthly seminar meets in the St. Mary’s School Computer Lab, and integrates recent findings in the behavioral sciences with the ancient teachings of Christ.

“I bring a presentation and present it to the group, and others share their thoughts and reflections, which often are quite inspirational to each other and to me,” Dr. McCormack says. “I give a handout at each session that we can follow together, with one side on the psychological information and the other side on the spiritual teachings we are drawing upon. Each session also involves prayer and, usually, a religious or spiritual song that captures the theme of the night. A bulletin announcement the week before briefly summarizes the content of the upcoming meeting, and I also have an e-mail list, where people who are signed up get a reminder that we are meeting each month.”

The group covers a wide range of topics that underscore how participants can utilize psychological and faith-based principles in their everyday lives to maximize their mental and spiritual well-being. For example, in December, the group explored how four of the “therapeutic lifestyle changes” – healthy relationships, stress management, religious/spiritual practice lifestyles, and a life of contribution and service – directly relate to Advent preparation for the birth of Christ.

“We looked at Advent relationships with God and others in the sense this is a joyful time,” Dr. McCormack explains. “So we looked at stress management as turning toward Jesus to relieve our stress, which is what the Advent season begs us to do, and also the life of contribution and service, which scientists are beginning to tentatively conclude is the most powerful of all the therapeutic lifestyle changes. Advent begs us to serve and take care of our brother, the poor, and the lonely. So that would be a way that we would take a scientific principle and integrate it with something the Church has been teaching us for hundreds of thousands of years.”

For Dr. McCormack, facilitating this ministry has greatly enhanced his faith development, and has been a wonderful supplement to daily Mass and Eucharistic Adoration in helping him achieve spiritual growth.

“In a way, it forces me to regularly confront, in some thoughtful way, personal issues that arise for me between my faith and my work, and sort them through,” he says. “There’s nothing like knowing you’ve got to present something to someone else to get you to pray and reflect on it. For me, it’s a great incentive to push myself to grow spiritually.”

“Where Psychology Meets Christ” meets on the third Wednesday of each month from September through June at 6:45 p.m. Parishioners are invited to simply stop by the school Computer Lab at this time, or you can e-mail Dr. McCormack at popcormac@knology.net to get on the ministry’s e-mail distribution list, and receive monthly updates. For further information on this ministry, please contact Dr. McCormack at 706-733-6627, ext. 302.

Lenten Practices: Penance and Abstinence

To many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our Faith as is our sacred liturgy.

If there is one thing Catholics are good at, it's abiding to the laws of tradition, and the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the Faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence and directs the faithful on when it's encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence:

1. All humans are sinners
 2. Penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God
 3. The Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance
 4. Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.
- The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ, not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord's experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday (which falls on Feb. 22 this year) and Good Friday (April 6). And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent. Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits



in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.

But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others – just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind – "by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own."

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time (prayer), talent (actions) and treasure (monetary offerings). The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.

Parishioner Profile: *Dr. Theresa Christie*

When it comes to discerning God's will, it is not an easy road to travel. Sometimes there may seem to be no answers, or not the ones we want to hear. Sometimes there are even several viable answers, but which one is best? And sometimes, as we can learn from parishioner Dr. Theresa Christie, the answer doesn't present itself until years later.



Dr. Christie (far right) during a Secular Franciscan event

Originally from Bay Shore, N.Y. located on the south shore of Long Island, Dr. Christie grew up in a large, Catholic family. Her family attended Mass together, and although they lived in an area with an abundance of Catholics, she says her family wasn't extremely active in the Church; in fact, being a Catholic was "understood" and not necessarily discussed.

But when Dr. Christie was in high school she attended a weekend retreat entitled Christian Awakening. It was an intense weekend, and by the end of the retreat she felt called to do something more with her faith. The hard part was discovering what that something was.

"During that weekend I definitely experienced a spiritual high but, as is often the case when you return home from an experience like that, the feeling wanes," she explains. "So it was confusing. I definitely felt a calling to do something religious, but I also wanted to be able to be a mom and wife, and to be a physician."

There were questions, but no easy answers, and then life got busy. She attended Stony Brook University, Boston University, and finally enrolled in New York Medical College – a Catholic medical college. Dr. Christie admits that during her college years she fell away from the Church for a while, but with marriage and motherhood she discovered the need to return.

"When I had my daughter, Kaitlin, I began to explore my faith again," she explains. "And it was during this period that I simply realized I couldn't be anything other than Catholic."

A job offered brought the Christie family to Augusta, and Dr. Christie became a founding partner at Southern Women's Obstetrics and Gynecology located on the campus of Trinity Hospital. She also became involved at

St. Mary's, and over the years has participated in the music ministry, CCD, and RCIA where she is occasionally asked to give a talk titled "Abortion and Euthanasia, The Truth of the Matter."

As she immersed herself in parish life, that same feeling which began years earlier during her high school retreat returned. She was a wife, she was a mother, and she was a physician . . . but she still felt drawn to the religious life. This time, however,

she found an answer through the Secular Franciscan Order which allowed her to be all these things as well as help her focus on God in her life.

Established over 800 years ago by St. Francis of Assisi, the Secular Franciscan Order is a lay order of men, women, priests and religious who strive to live a Gospel life according to the examples of St. Francis and St. Clare. Members meet monthly and strive to incorporate the order's pillars of spirituality, formation, apostolate and fraternity into everyday life.

Ever mindful of the words of St. Francis who reminds us to preach the Gospel and to use words only when necessary, Dr. Christie says that being a part of the Secular Franciscans means striving to live in such a way so that actions speak more loudly than words, for it is through our actions that the Gospel message truly comes alive.

"All of the women in my office know that I am Catholic, and they also know I am a Secular Franciscan," she explains. "Taking care of the sick and providing for indigent care brings my faith to the work place. I feel that it is up to us, the members of the Church and the body of Christ, to be an example to our young people and show them the importance of works of mercy."

Finally, Dr. Christie believes that parish involvement allows one to see the beauty in the teachings of Christ and the Church as well as stay focused on the ultimate goal of salvation; in fact, living the Gospel message goes a long way in discerning God's will. Wife? Mother? Religious? It was her involvement at St. Mary's that led her to the Secular Franciscan Order – God's answer to her, so she could be all three.



Sacred Focus

by special contributor Mary Kate Conner

Since the ramblings of a high school teen are not much in comparison to an experienced mother of eight, writing for my mom's column was something I was definitely hesitant of at first. Even though this is not an easy task- and is taking up a bit of my own personal time- here I am. This same hesitant attitude is often taken up during the quickly upcoming season of Lent. Sacrifice and penance are tasks more easily said than done for us simple humans. We are hesitant to challenge ourselves, but yet, each year, we find ourselves doing so — some more readily than others. In order to make the season of Lent more of a preparation and a privilege than a chore, we simply must readjust our focus. Jesus doesn't want us to be unhappy, so we simply have find ways to challenge our spiritual life without pushing our limits.

Through the years, many Lenten traditions have sprung up in my family. My mom always encourages small penances and extra prayer time, so to keep track of what we do, we place a colored bead in a jar depending on what we do(white for going to daily mass, blue for prayers to Mother Mary, purple for a kind deed, etc). Weekly Stations of the Cross is also a good way to help us remember what our focus is during the season. Whenever we kids grump about something my parents

always say "Offer it up!" Though this all-too-often used phrase is usually bothersome, it does hold truth. During Lent, it's common to offer things up like sweets or Facebook, though sometimes this becomes more of a hassle than a prayerful sacrifice and we may lose sight of the purpose of it. The purpose, of course, is Jesus and focusing our hearts and minds on his ultimate sacrifice- not thinking how inconvenient or difficult it is to spend 40 days without something we are so unnecessarily attached to. During Lent, we can realize how attached we are earthly things, and the more we empty our lives of these attachments, the more we can be filled up with Jesus.

These sacrifices are sometimes difficult, no doubt. However, in the wise words of my parents, we can offer them up to win graces for others, instead of complaining. Uniting our sacrifices with Christ's suffering is powerful and, again, helps us to maintain our focus on the holy season.

The more we embrace the sacrifices and penances of Lent, the better will be the joy of Easter. So as we begin Lent, may we always keep our eyes on Christ, the reason for every season. May God grant you the grace we all need for this holy season.

In order to make the season of Lent more of a preparation and a privilege than a chore, we simply must readjust our focus. Jesus doesn't want us to be unhappy, so we simply have find ways to challenge our spiritual life without pushing our limits.

Engaging the World with Faith and Love *continued from front cover*

will experience a sense of values consistent with their own. Unfortunately in many schools, the subject of values, particularly Christian values, is something that the school cannot even address openly. At both St. Mary School and Aquinas High School, we not only offer an excellent academic education so that our students are well prepared for the rigors of higher education; we more importantly offer sound faith formation so that our students can answer one of life's most basic questions: "What does God want me to do?" This question is answered in the youngest grades by teaching children to love God and in older grades by offering students the Church's wisdom for living a moral and productive life.

In our Catholic schools we focus on the values of faith, hope, love, and community. We talk openly about values and spend time each day giving children an opportunity to learn, share, and understand the consequences of good and bad behaviors. We believe in Jesus Christ and we have a feeling of grace that comes from our beliefs.

Can the school your child attends teach the sort of lessons that will help your child become a good and compassionate person? Is there a clear expectation that all children will be treated with respect by teachers and other students? How a school handles these issues indicates whether the school is capable of reinforcing the values that you and other parents teach at home.

In a very real way, our Catholic schools can produce not just good citizens, but saints. This aim is so noble that it truly deserves the support of all Catholics, not just those with school-age children. I am so very grateful to all the sacrifices that so many make in our faith community to support our parish school.

God bless you,



Fr. Jerry

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Bao Quoc Ho and Phuong Y. Dinh

Carlos Pietro Gomes de Souza
Carlos de Araujo Souza and Acacia Alves Gomes

Ash Wednesday Schedule

February 22nd

7:00 a.m., 9:15 a.m.,

12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

