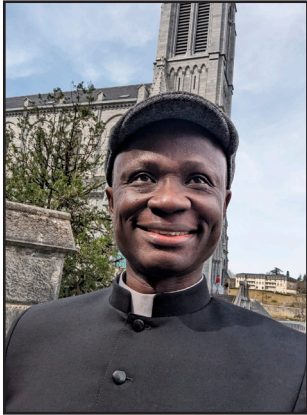


St. Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church NEWSLETTER

April 2024

Volume 27

LETTER FROM FR. DAVID



Fr. David Paintsil

My dearly beloved in Christ, Happy Easter! And may the peace of the risen Lord be with you.

It fills my heart with great joy and gratitude that I write these few words of encouragement to you during this Easter season.

Upon my arrival at St. Mary's Parish on July 1, 2023, the first article written to introduce me to the Parish was in August 2023. In that article, it was indicated that I love Jesus and our Blessed Mother Mary so much. Yes, that is exactly the case. I have special devotion to the Holy Eucharist and our Blessed Mother Mary. The bulk of my ministry back in Ghana had been to practice and promote the Eucharistic and Marian devotions as much as I could.

Early last year when I arrived in Davenport and received my pastoral assignment to St. Mary's parish in Iowa City, the first thing I did was to go to the parish website to catch a glimpse of what St. Mary's parish looks like. And what caught my attention immediately was the Mission statement of the Parish which states: "We, the people of Saint Mary's Parish of Iowa City, are a Eucharistic community whose mission is to worship and pray, to grow in faith and discipleship, and to serve those who are in need. We respect the traditions of the past and are open to the guidance of the Spirit as we move into the future". My initial reaction was, "Wow, this is awesome". I actually fell in love with St. Mary's parish at that moment. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also states that "the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life." In fact, all the sacraments, ministries, and works of the apostolate are bound up and oriented to the Eucharist (No. 1324). The centrality of the Eucharist to the life of the church made the United States Bishops Conference to declare a National Eucharistic revival which will culminate in Indianapolis this July.

In line with our mission as a parish and in responding to the call of the US Bishops conference for a National Eucharistic revival, I am glad to announce to you that our parish together with St. Wenceslaus parish will embark on a Eucharistic procession in Iowa City on June 2, 2024 on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Detailed information will be provided in due time. This will be preceded by at least a 24 – Hour Eucharistic adoration where individuals and groups could sign up to adore the Lord. My dear brothers and sisters, this is a great opportunity to witness to Jesus both privately and publicly. It's time to be courageous with our faith and make it visible. Let us make up our minds to participate in it and invite our family

members and friends to join.

I recently returned from my Marian pilgrimage to Fatima in Portugal, Lourdes in France, Avila and Santiago De Compostela in Spain. Fr. Jeff, Fr. Terry, Peter (Seminarist) and a number of Christ's faithful were on this trip. I actually don't have enough words to describe my experiences at these holy sites we visited. These places are the important pilgrimage centers I have long desired to visit. Back in Ghana, I facilitated the construction of Marian Shrine or Grotto dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and modelled accorded to that of Fatima. Thus, visiting these places personally for the first time was very touching and inspirational for me. Back in Ghana, I sought to promote the devotion to our Lady and continue to do so through social media. It is my desire that you, the wonderful parishioners at St. Mary's here in Iowa City, will also be blessed with my little Marian devotional experience.

Our Parish has Mary of the Visitation as its patroness. And as Catholics, we know that the Month of May is dedicated to our Blessed mother Mary. On May 31 every year, the Church celebrates the feast of the Visitation of Mary which also happens to be the feast day of our parish. In light of this, I would like to propose that we set aside the month of May to carry out a special Marian program known as 'Marian Consecration' on May 31, 2024. This is usually preceded by a 33 – day preparation of spiritual reading and prayer. More information will be provided on it.

This model of Marian Consecration was given to the church through St. Louis De Montford. Many great Saints like St. Pope John Paul II and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta did this consecration. I have met priests, religious and lay faithful who have done this consecration. I have done this consecration too. And when I arrived in Iowa, my first public Mass I attended was for the Marian Consecration at Holy Family Catholic Church in Davenport led by Fr. Nicholas Akindele. For St. Pope John Paul II, his consecration was a "turning point" in his life. And according to St. Louis De Montford, it is "the surest, easiest, shortest, and the most perfect means" to becoming a Saint. I humbly invite you to participate in it.

In short, there are two important upcoming spiritual events for our parish that we need to prepare for: the Eucharistic Procession on June 2 and the Marian Consecration on May 31. May our Blessed Mother Mary cover us with her mantle of grace and lead us closer to her beloved son our lord Jesus Christ, Amen

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Consecration to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary

Article By: Dan Teets

Do you want to be a saint? If you want to spend eternity in total communion with God in Heaven, then the answer is, "Yes, I do want to be a saint!"

When Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, was in the seminary someone gave him a copy of the book *True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Montfort. Fr. Michael did not think that he had time to read this book in addition to his seminary studies. But, one day he was looking over the book and read the following quote from St. Louis de Montfort, "Consecration to [Jesus through] Mary is the quickest, the easiest, and the surest way to become a saint!"

Well, since Fr. Michael wanted to become a saint, the quote got his attention. He eventually did the Consecration to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary and then developed a way that others can do it using his book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*.

I used Fr. Michael Gaitley's book several years ago to do my own consecration to Jesus through Mary. Several members of my family did the consecration to Mary in the following year. I renew my consecration each morning by using this short prayer, "Mary, my mother, I give myself totally to you as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all that I am and have, whatever most pleases you. Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for bring the greatest possible Glory to God."

When Fr. David Paintsil came to St. Mary Church in Iowa City he brought forth the idea of having a group of people prepare for the Marian consecration leading up to our parish feast day, **the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, which is celebrated each year on May 31st. I am overjoyed with this possibility! Many blessings can come from this consecration!



So, leading up to our parish feast day we will be using Fr. Michael Gaitley's book, *33 Days to Morning Glory*, to prepare ourselves for Consecration to Jesus through his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We will be meeting once each week as a group to pray the Rosary together, to encourage each other, and to discuss how each day is going for us and what we are learning through our preparation time.

We will meet on Sunday evenings at St. Mary Church Hall from 6:00-7:00pm. The schedule will be as follows:

Sunday, April 28: Kick-Off Session: Introduction to Consecration

Sunday, May 5: St. Louis de Montfort (and Consecration to Jesus through Mary)

Sunday, May 12: St. Maximilian Kolbe (and Consecration to Jesus through Mary)

Sunday, May 19: St. Teresa of Calcutta (and Consecration to Jesus through Mary)

Sunday, May 26: Pope St. John Paul II (and Consecration to Jesus through Mary) Friday,

May 31: Immediately following the 12:10pm Mass, Consecration Prayer and opportunity to discuss the Final 5 Days: Review

Friday, May 31: 6:00-7:00pm, Consecration Prayer and opportunity to discuss the Final 5 Days: Review

There is no cost to register for this consecration opportunity. You will eventually have an opportunity to make a free will donation if you choose to offset the cost of the *33 Days to Morning Glory* book. You do not need to attend each of the Sunday evening meetings. But you are strongly encouraged to attend one of the Consecration prayer opportunities on our parish feast day (**the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**) on May 31st.

If you have already made the consecration to Jesus through Mary using *33 Days to Morning Glory* or another resource, you are still welcome to join our group to renew your consecration!

You can register for this opportunity by scanning the QR code below and completing the short registration form, or you may call Dan Teets at (319) 337-4314, ext. 105 and leave your name, phone number, and preferred email.

I guarantee that if you make the time to consecrate yourself to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary and renew your consecration each day it will change your life!



On Saturday, March 30, four adults and eight youth were baptized into the Catholic faith at St. Mary's Easter Vigil. The four adults and seven of the youth also received the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. It was a glorious celebration and we are blessed to have these new members as part of our St. Mary's family!

Top Row (left to right): Stuart Wood, Eden Smith, Kaitlyn Stastny, Wade Carter, Thomas Pedersen

Front Row (left to right): Ian Komlan, Kekeli Komlan, Brynn Borgwardt, Joyce Matondo, Jeremiah Peter, William Matondo, Zachary Matondo.

National Eucharistic Congress and Pilgrimage

The 10th National Eucharistic Congress (<https://www.eucharisticcongress.org>), will be the first National Eucharistic Congress in 83 Years. The Congress will take place July 17th – 21st, 2024 in Indianapolis, Indiana at Lucas Oil Stadium and other nearby venues in downtown Indianapolis. It is an invitation to experience profound personal revival so we can be sent out to share Christ's love with a world that so desperately needs it. The Congress will be a key event of the National Eucharistic Revival, which is a movement to restore understanding and devotion to the Eucharist in the United States by helping to renew our worship of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This is a pivotal moment in both American history and the legacy of the Catholic Church.

At the National Eucharistic Congress, more than 80,000 Catholics of all ages will gather to reconsecrate their hearts to the source and summit of our faith. Then, having enkindled a missionary fire in the hearts of the American faithful, they will share the gift of our Eucharistic Lord as we enter the universal Church's jubilee year in 2025. Like a new Pentecost, this transformation will flow out from Indianapolis to bring revival in our communities as the Church returns to the Eucharist, her first love and the source and summit of our faith.

Since 1895, the U.S. has been host to nine National Eucharistic Congresses and two International Eucharistic Congresses [1926 (Chicago) & 1976 (Philadelphia)]. The National Eucharistic Congresses held in the U.S. include 1895 (Washington, DC), 1901 (St. Louis), 1904 (New York), 1907 (Pittsburgh), 1911 (Cincinnati), 1930 (Omaha), 1935 (Cleveland), 1938 (New Orleans) and 1941 (Minneapolis-St. Paul).

Each day at the 5-day 2024 Congress is designed to facilitate a life-changing encounter with Jesus, regardless of where attendees are on their faith journey. Mass will begin each day. Attendees will select their preferred series of impact sessions for the morning and breakout sessions for the afternoon. Then, gathered together as one, the whole assembly will experience the powerful revival sessions in Lucas Oil Stadium each evening. Eucharistic Adoration will occur after the revival sessions.

Held in and near Lucas Oil Stadium,

this transformative experience features well-known keynote speakers, uplifting worship, and powerful moments of prayer with thousands of Catholics from around the United States. Speakers include Bishop Robert Barron, Fr. Mike Schmitz, Dr. Scott Hahn, Katie Prejean McGrady, Sr. Mary Grace Langrell, Dr. Mary Healy, Dr. Edward Sri, Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, and Curtis Martin.

Day 1: From the Four Corners – As the Congress begins, the four branches of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage (<https://www.eucharisticpilgrimage.org>) will converge at the venue in a powerful symbol of unity. Then, gathered as one Church, attendees will present their wounded and imperfect hearts to the triune God who loves us. Just as he did on the road to Emmaus, Our Lord will listen to attendees' worries and reveal himself once more in the breaking of the bread.

Day 2: The Greatest Love Story – During this first full day of the Congress, participants will receive a clear kerygmatic proclamation that invites them into intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. Together, they will have the opportunity to respond to this call in the celebration of the Eucharist. Then they will uncover how the story of our lives can be truly understood within the context of salvation history—the greatest love story ever told.

Day 3: Into Gethsemane – Today, attendees' eyes will be opened to the effects of sin and the healing that Our Lord wants to give us. On the individual level, there will be opportunities for the healing of the whole person, including physical healing, psychological wounds, and spiritual sin. On the corporate level, the Congress will recognize the areas where we've failed as a Church and the repentance and healing needed to unify the Body of Christ. As they are purified and restored, attendees' hearts will burn with renewed zeal.

Day 4: This Is My Body – In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke recounts that the disciples "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Using the early Church as a model, this day will build up participants as disciples through Jesus Christ to live out the Gospel in their love of both God and neighbor.

Article By: Bill Doucette

Day 5: To the Ends of the Earth – Pope Francis said the Eucharist is "a summons to go forth, as missionaries, to bring the message of the Father's tenderness, forgiveness and mercy to every man, woman and child." Throughout the history of the Church, the Holy Spirit has empowered the Church to go to the ends of the earth to share the good news. On this last day of the Congress, attendees will be commissioned to go out into the world as missionary disciples as we enter the third year of the National Eucharistic Revival: the Year of Mission.

National Eucharistic Pilgrimage

Throughout the National Eucharistic Revival, local communities are gathering tinder in response to God's invitation for renewal, calling on the Holy Spirit to bring the flame. In keeping with this vision, the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage will accompany Jesus from city to city, lighting hearts on fire along the way. Then, at the National Eucharistic Congress in July 2024, all these flames will blaze together. Jesus will process on four routes to Indianapolis for the National Eucharistic Congress over 60 days.

Two routes will come in or near Iowa: 1) the Marian Route that passes from northern Minnesota down through La Crosse, WI (June 6) over to eastern Wisconsin and then through Chicago and 2) the St. Junipero Serra Route that starts on the west coast and goes through Nebraska to Glenwood, Imogene and Shenandoah, Iowa (June 24-25) and down to Kansas City (June 28-29) and across Missouri to St. Louis (July 6-7). Activities along the way include Eucharistic processions, Masses, Eucharistic Adoration, and parish dinners at host parishes.

All of us are encouraged to discern about our involvement in these national events happening this summer. Both the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage and the National Eucharistic Congress offer us opportunities to strengthen our commitment to Jesus in the Eucharist. Please consider joining our Catholic brothers and sisters in catching the fire of the Holy Spirit to grow our love of Jesus.

BAPTISMS

DANIEL WILLIAM ELLEFSON

IZRI JAMES CRUZ GODAGAMA

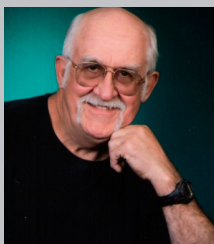
AURORA DOROTHY ROUSH-KRAFKA

LUELLA DELL BERG

FUNERALS



ANN ELIZABETH SMOTHERS



DAVID SEYDEL



WILLIAM KALLAUS

Hospitality Commission

Article By: Sr. Agnes Giblin, BVM



volunteers serving Thanksgiving dinner

Welcome! Celebrations! Receptions! Support!...key words describing the ministry of the Fellowship Commission.

Members call and welcome new parishioners. They visit with them, introduce them to the parish, answer questions and assure them of our support. It is important to us, that they receive a phone call, not just a text or email. It might be a message, but a human voice is important.

Celebrations and receptions are a part of our responsibility along with Sunday morning Coffee Hour. Opportunities for parishioners to meet and greet each other is one of our goals whether it be with a cup of coffee and a donut, cookies and punch or whatever.

Supporting families who have lost a loved one is a large part of the ministry. We provide a brunch or a lunch, either before or after the burial. It provides an opportunity for the families to continue sharing stories and memories connected to their loved one.

Our once a year activity is organizing and supervising our Annual Thanksgiving Dinner. This activity takes place in conjunction with our Free Lunch volunteers and many parishioners.

If you like parties, helping people connect and celebrate, we would love to have you as part of our commission.

There are many ways to be connected: We meet one night every two months, certainly we would welcome you. However there are a few ways you can connect right from your own home: make phone calls, bake cookies, etc. or periodically help with a funeral luncheon.

For more information you can call: Kathy Brechler: (319)354-9872

Anita Hemingway: (319)430-7893

The parish office: (319)337-4314

Think about it! You will be welcomed with open arms!

Pantry Sunday Revived

For many years, the fourth Sunday of the month was called "Pantry Sunday", an opportunity to reach out and share some products that could be given to people in need through the Crisis Center.

Beginning in April, the fourth Sunday of each month will be designated as Pantry Sunday.

During the month, we will inform you of their needs. Donations do not need to be limited to the list. Non-perishable items as well as personal hygiene products (soap, Kleenex, etc.) are always welcome.

Contributions may be placed in the bin in the parish hall. Mark your calendar and watch the bulletin: April 27th/28th—Revival of Pantry Sunday!

Eucharistic Procession

June 2nd, 2024 at Noon

A Eucharistic procession is like a holy parade that brings Jesus, truly present in the Holy Eucharist, into the world that he loves. The Blessed Sacrament is placed in a monstrance and carried out of the church by a priest. A Eucharistic procession sometimes begins at one church and ends at another and is connected to the celebration of the Mass or a time of Adoration.

The procession can be a short walk around the neighborhood of a church or can stretch for miles and miles from start to finish—ours will only be about a mile! Along the way, Jesus is accompanied by priests, deacons, altar servers, and people of all ages. Together they can pray the Rosary, sing hymns, or walk in silent prayer. Processions are often planned for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi but can take place just about any time of the year.

The altar servers or other members of the Eucharistic procession might carry a canopy, processional cross, candles, a thurible, or bells. One type of processional canopy, a baldacchino, is held over the monstrance by four servers holding a pole for each corner. This creates a sacred space that is set aside for the Eucharist during the movement of the procession. The processional cross is a large crucifix attached to a long handle that can be lifted high for all to see. The candles remind us of Jesus, the Light of the World, truly present in the Holy Eucharist. The thurible is filled with burning incense, which releases sweet-smelling smoke that rises to the sky, symbolizing our prayers rising to heaven. The bells incorporate another of our five senses, announcing that Jesus is here with us. A Eucharistic procession is a wonderful opportunity to worship our Lord and pray together as a community as we witness our faith publicly to the world.

All are welcome to join this family-friendly event!

Music Notes

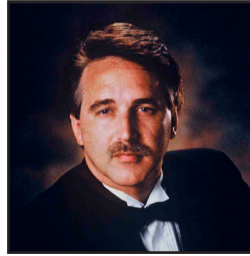
with Renee Thomas, John Crosheck, and Joe Mattingly



Renee Thomas



John Crosheck



Joe Mattingly

Article By: Colleen Hogan

to celebrate the season of Christmas, and there is far too much from which to pick and choose. From plainchant to motet to choral requiems, masses, organ masterworks and contemporary “pop” style works and arrangements, I never grow weary of the music of the church.

8. DO YOU USE/SHARE YOUR MUSICAL TALENT ELSEWHERE?

Renee: I am an aspiring elementary music teacher, and I currently play in the University of Iowa horn choir, the Saint Mary's handbell choir, and I sing and play in the church choir.

John: I've been involved in community theatre through the years in Iowa City, Coralville, Mt. Vernon, and Anamosa.

Joe: I have worked in music all my life. For most of the last forty years my primary role has been in liturgy, but I have played in bands of all styles, from rock to country to disco. Music is my life and passion.

9. DO YOU HAVE A DAY JOB/PROFESSION?

Renee: I am a substitute teacher in the Iowa City Community School District.

John: I am currently working with test scoring at Pearson. I have been a substitute teacher at Regina Elementary the last four falls.

Joe: I play frequently here at St. Mary's; I also play at St. Patrick's, occasionally at St. Thomas More, and a number of other churches. I assist at weddings, funerals and special events. I tour nationally with my independent group, the Holy Mountain Singers, traveling to parishes, presenting at the National Association of Pastoral Musicians' conferences and other events. Having completed my Doctorate in music composition two years ago, I am currently teaching musicology and private composition at the collegiate level. And finally, I have a recording studio that I operate, Holy Mountain Studios.

10. OTHER BIT OF INFORMATION TO SHARE ABOUT YOURSELF OR YOUR FAMILY?

Renee: I want everyone to know that you don't have to be a professional to make music with others! I make mistakes as often as I make music, and it's a source of humility. It's all about giving glory to God!

John: I'm the third of six kids and am blessed to live just fifteen minutes from my parents. I also have three cats who are in charge at my house!

Joe: In seventh grade I was the local YMCA table tennis champion in Newton, Iowa.

1. WHAT CREATED YOUR INTEREST IN BEING A MUSICIAN?

Renee: I have always enjoyed singing in church, and Patti McTaggart asked me if I would like to be a cantor.

John: I first cantored when attending St. Ambrose in Davenport. It was a great way to share my gift of music with others at Mass.

Joe: Music runs deep in our family. My father was a violinist and orchestra director and later opened a family run music retail business in Newton, Iowa. My grandmother was a piano teacher and music played an important role on both sides of the family. I and my six siblings all studied piano and other instruments from an early age, which for me included piano, violin, and guitar. My father encouraged his children to study Music has been a central focus in our family.

2. WHEN DID YOU BECOME A MUSICIAN AT ST. MARY'S?

Renee: I started cantoring in the fall of 2020, and I remember there were still a lot of music restrictions due to the pandemic. It is definitely a gift to be able to sing as a congregation again.

John: I honestly do not remember when I started as a cantor at St. Mary's. It's been forever!

Joe: I've been playing off and on at St. Mary's for the last five or six years, as my schedule allows.

3. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE ASPECT OF BEING A MUSICIAN AT ST. MARY'S?

Renee: I love singing during Communion and being able to connect the music to the act of receiving Jesus. I am always reminded of John the Baptist when we sing “Behold the Lamb of God” and I get to proclaim that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.

John: I always say I am doing my “job” right if I help others feel comfortable singing along with me since I'm there to lead the congregation in song!

Joe: The most satisfying aspect of my role as a liturgical pianist is hearing the church celebrate in song – and in knowing that my gift plays a small part in that song.

4. WHERE IS YOUR HOMETOWN?

Renee: I am from Iowa City, and Saint Mary's has always been my home parish.

John: I was born in Iowa City and spent my first couple years of life in the area while my dad completed his PhD at the University of Iowa.

Joe: I was born in Council Bluffs, IA, but my formative years were spent in Newton, Iowa.

5. DID YOU PERFORM IN HIGH SCHOOL OR COLLEGE?

Renee: I played the violin and French horn in high school, and I studied French horn performance and music education in college.

John: Yes, in both high school and college.

Joe: I have been performing since 2nd grade, either as a pianist, vocalist, guitarist or violinist.

6. DO YOU RECALL YOUR FIRST SOLO?

Renee: There were always little bits of solo in band and orchestra pieces, but my first big solo would have been at a recital during my freshman year of college. It is definitely nerve-racking the first few times, but it gets easier.

John: I can vaguely remember it was in high school when participating in a musical.

Joe: As a piano student I played in recitals from kindergarten forward. My first vocal solo was standing in front of my 2nd grade class singing the Star Spangled Banner.

7. DOES A CERTAIN HYMN HOLD SPECIAL MEANING FOR YOU?

Renee: I love “Alleluia, Let the Holy Anthem Rise”. The melody and lyrics are very compelling, and I believe it was the recessional hymn at my grandma's funeral.

John: Probably one of the most powerful hymns for me is “How Great Thou Art.” The words always get me!

Joe: Works such as O God Beyond All Praising (lyrics by Michael Perry, set to the majestic music of Gustav Holst's Jupiter / The Planets) to the lyrical and inspiring melodies of contemporary composers are among my favorites. The repertoire of the church is ever expanding! Add to that the incredibly diverse body of seasonal music, such as the thousands of works set

CONFIRMATIONS

FATIMA BATAI

BRODY BEAVER

KYLA BELL

FINN BOYLE

CARSON COMER

JACOB CORBETT

CALVIN DILLON

LUCAS DONATO

ROAN ECKHOFF

INES GANGBA

EDWIN GANGBA

DEAN HANES

PAUL HINCKLEY

CHLOE HOUSELOG

ELISE JESPERSEN

MELANIE KIRK

ALIX LAMA

WILLIAM LITTON

MAX LYNCH

DANIEL MAMBO

GAVIN MCELENEY

MADDUX NEUKIRCH

PORTER SHETLER

SIMON SHETLER

WILLIAM SHEY

OWEN STEFFEN

DEVIN SZANAJDA

LILY TENTINGER

DOMINIC THOMAS

MATTHEW TRAN

BRADY VENZON

KAMMDYN WALLACE

ANTHONY WHITE

Persecutions of the Early Church

Article By: Robert Tomanek

always violent, and not limited to the Apostles, but included thousands of ordinary Christians.

100 – 312 AD: Period of Persecutions

The Roman Empire was in chaos. There were wars with the Franks and Persians, and many of their emperors were murdered. Yet, the Church was surviving, because writings defending the faith gave rise to the first Christian apologists and countered the Gnostics and heresies. St. Justin Martyr wrote a letter to the emperor defending the faith, while St. Irenaeus focused on heresies and the Holy Eucharist. However, in 202 AD, an Edict made it illegal to convert to Christianity and then, in 250 AD, another Edict required Christians to participate in worship of the emperor. The intensity of the persecutions continued to increase, and in 303 AD an empire-wide persecution began. The state confiscated churches and books, and arrested, tortured, and executed clergy. During this period, many thousands of Christians were also tortured and killed, or sent to the mines. The martyred female saints of this period included Agnes of Rome, Lucy, and Cecilia. The persecutions also took the lives of three early Church Fathers: Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr, all of whom played important roles in defense and preservation of the faith.

Preservation of the Faith

The Christian Faith, during the persecutions of the first three centuries, was so strong that the Church was preserved. Many pagans, Scribes and Sadducees (Acts 4:1 & 5:17), and other Jews, were converted, because of the strong message of love and faith professed by Christians. Due to the violence perpetrated by the Roman authorities, especially public torture and execution, the Roman public took a sympathetic view of the victims, and they respected their courage. Apologists for the Church played a critical role during this difficult period. They wrote and encouraged the faithful. Ignatius of Antioch, martyred in 110 AD, wrote a series of letters affirming Christian theology. Polycarp, a bishop, the last connection to the 12 Apostles, wrote an Epistle filled with encouragement and Christian duty, and was martyred in 155 AD. Irenaeus, a bishop, and pupil of Polycarp, was the leading Christian theologian of the second century. He advanced the development of an authoritative Canon of Scriptures and the Creed.

In 311, the Edict of Galerius, a decree of toleration of open Christian worship, was a major improvement. Two years later the Edict of Constantine decreed toleration of all religions thus ending persecutions. Then in 380 AD, Christianity was declared as the one and only official religion of the Roman Empire.

The first century AD of the Church is known as the “Mustard Seed” because it encompassed the beginning of the Catholic Church. Christ’s 12 Apostles went into the world to spread the Gospel, where they faced many difficulties and often death. Christ told them – “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master! If they persecute me, they will persecute you’ (John 15-20).” Fifty days after Christ’s resurrection, the apostles gathered in the Upper Room where they heard and felt a strong wind, and saw tongues of fire. Filled with the Holy Spirit they went forth and spread the gospel. They quickly learned that persecutions were a part of their lives, as they witnessed St. Stephen’s call to give his life for Christ. At the same time they witnessed St. Paul, an avid persecutor of the Church, miraculously convert to their cause and become a tireless source of declaring the Good News to the Gentiles.

Roman Anti-Christian Environment

Persecutions of Christians during the first 30 years came primarily from the Jewish leaders who considered Christianity to be inconsistent with their own teachings and a threat to their leadership. Roman leaders accepted Judaism because it had a long history, but Christianity was new and unpredictable. Moreover, Christians refused to offer unquestionable allegiance and priority to the state and Caesar. They were easy targets and they were loathed by the aristocratic culture because they were members of the “poor class.” Nero’s reign (54-68 AD) included the martyrdom of Saints Paul and Peter. He ordered the burning of Rome, a fire that took thousands of lives, because he planned to build a new city in its place. Informers were bribed to attest that the fire was the work of Christians, which further fed the anti-Christian sentiment. During the first 60 years, Christians struggled with both external, i.e., the state, and internal, i.e., heretics issues. Roman leaders were the major force of the persecution of Christians, but Jews contributed by urging the authorities to take actions against Christians, and even to execute them. Stoning of Christians was not uncommon, as noted by the stoning of James by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Martyrdom of Eleven of Twelve Apostles

In 44 AD, James the Greater was the first Apostle to be martyred, a death by beheading ordered by King Herod Agrippa. Some other Apostles that were killed two decades later included James the Lesser, Peter (who chose upside-down crucifixion because he felt unworthy to die just like Jesus), Simon the Zealot, Jude, and Andrew. An Apostle that survived much longer was Timothy, who was in his nineties when a mob in Ephesus killed him because he opposed idol worship. John was the only Apostle who is not known to have been martyred. The deaths experienced by these martyrs were

May devotion to Mary

The month of May is dedicated to Mary. Spring is in full force, with new life coming forth from the Earth, and all it contains. May is also the month that we celebrate our mothers. Mothers bring forth new life as well. Not only that, they care for us, teach us and nurture us. Mary is our ultimate mother, our spiritual mother, Mother of God, and Mother of the Church. She is our co-redemptrix with Christ, and teaches us obedience when she says, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

She has many names, including Virgin, Mother, Queen, and Mystical Rose, as we see in the Litany of Loreto. She appears to us in many forms, such as Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Kibeho. She pleads with us to pray and to go to her Son for everything. She wants what is best for us, and she loves us with the pure love of her Immaculate Heart. In her humility, she does not demand or push. She simply asks. She is always ready to help us in our neediness, console us in our sadness, and protect us in our difficulties with temptation and sin.

Like a good mother, she teaches us to go to Jesus. We ask her in the Salve Regina to show us the way to Him.

"Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor, banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Oh Clement, oh loving, oh sweet Virgin Mary, pray for us oh most holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ."

When we pray the rosary, contemplating the life of Jesus, we ask her, our greatest intercessor, to pray for us now (which is always) and at the hour of our death, when we most need to be brought to Jesus.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

When we pray the Angelus, she shows



us how to be humble in relation to God and live his Word.

"The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to thy word. (Luke 1:38)

And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14)

When she proclaims the Magnificat, she shows us how to praise and glorify God.

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my savior, the mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation." (Luke 1:46-50).

Devotion to Mary is an important part of the Catholic identity. As our mother she is an example of a committed "Yes" to the will of God. Because of their devotion to her many people ask her for help in the most difficult moments of their life, as any child would with their mother.

The tradition of dedicating the month of May to Mary, came about in the 13th century. Some say because it was created to replace various pagan cults. But also, May is the time when spring is at the height of its beauty. Spring is also connected with nature renewing itself. In her way, Mary gave new life to the world when she gave birth to our savior Jesus Christ.

Article By: Julia Blake

The pious practice of honoring Mary during the month of May has been especially promoted by the popes. In 1965 Pope Paul VI began his encyclical, *Mense Maio*, by affirming the month of May as an opportune time to incorporate special prayers to Mary into traditional May devotions. Pius XII makes special reference of devotion to her in his encyclical on the sacred liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, paragraphs 169, 170 and 174.

Many popes and saints have had special devotions to Mary. St. Pope John Paul II chose as his papal motto "Totus Tuus" (meaning all yours) to express his personal consecration to Mary, based on the spiritual approach of St. Louis de Montfort and the Mariology in his works. A formal act of consecration to Mary, and living in habitual dependence on her, is a means of uniting with Christ.

Just as we honor our mothers on Mother's Day, we can honor Mary on her feast days and every day. The feast of the Visitation of Mary, which our church is named for, is on May 31st. It is also common to make a pilgrimage to Mary in May. There are many shrines to Mary, some as close as a local church. We can honor her wishes for us to pray the rosary. We can bring flowers to place near her statue or photo. There is also a custom of crowning Mary with a wreath of flowers to signify her queenship.

May is a beautiful month and it is the perfect time of year to honor our Blessed Mother, which in turn will help bring us closer to Jesus. Let us close with Sub Tuum Praesidium. This 3rd Century Marian prayer is believed to be the oldest known prayer to Mary. It was discovered in Egypt on a fragment of papyrus. The prayer follows:

"We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

This ancient prayer holds the origins of a central Marian dogma, Theotokos, Greek for Mother of God, and one of the most enduring Marian devotions, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

St. Mary of the Visitation

Catholic Church

302 E. Jefferson St. Iowa City, IA 52245



ST. MARY'S NEWSLETTER VOL. 27

Faith Journeys Speaker

Many years ago at Presentation Parish in Chicago, Illinois, the Gift was presented.

It was a small seed to be planted, the seed of Faith.

At the time, there was water for growth, oil for strength, a new garment, a candle to light the way and companions for the journey. Early on and for several years after the seed had been planted, it was nourished and nurtured in my own home where my companions were family and friends. They witnessed love, care, service, and compassion each day.

Following high school, the journey continued in Dubuque, Iowa. The BVM Community was added to my circle of friends as companions on the journey.

Throughout the years, the seed grew. It was nurtured and nourished by people of all ages and walks of life in Chicago, Dubuque, Emmetsburg, Jesup, Iowa City, Ireland, and on a cruise.

People have been, are, and continue to be the greatest source of growth. I have been privileged to journey with people who have roots in 5 of the 7 continents. Each of you are my faith-filled and faithful companions.

The most faithful and strongest companion has been my God. God has been with me each day of my journey. God has been that faithful companion who reminds me "that He will never leave me." Time spent each day with God is the greatest source of nourishment for my faith.

The seed was planted, has been cared for, it has grown—the gift is still mine today.

Our next **Faith Journeys** speaker will be

Sister Agnes Giblin, BVM

*The Gift of a Seed, the Seed of Faith:
The Gift That Will Last a Lifetime if
Nourished and Nurtured*



Sunday, June 9th at 2 PM
St. Mary's Church, Iowa City

My seed was and continues to be nurtured and nourished:

How?
When?
Where?
By Whom?

Join us on June 9th at 2 PM for the answers.

A lemonade and cookie reception will follow in the Parish Hall.
This talk will be livestreamed and available later on
St. Mary's of Iowa City YouTube Channel.