



The next issue of **The Mirror** will be **December 22, 2023**. Sign up to receive the diocesan newspaper via Email in digital format: Contact Debbie Thompson at (417) 866-0841, or Email: dthompson@dioscg.org.



The Birth of Jesus, NATIVITY OF THE LORD

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.

He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to those who believe in his name,
who were born not by natural generation
nor by human choice nor by a man's decision
but of God.

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth. ©TM

—Gospel of John 1:15, 9-14, *The Nativity of the Lord*
(Christmas) Mass during the Day



'Nativity Scene of the Birth of Jesus' by Elizabeth, <https://www.etsy.com/shop/ModernBibleArt>; @ModernBibleArt



COME, AND
YOU WILL SEE

Bp. Edward M. Rice

Root your activities in the true meaning of Christmas!

As we draw close to Christmas and the Christmas Season, I offer to you my prayers and a special remembrance during all of our beautiful celebrations. It is often the case that the days after Christmas give us the time to pause and reflect on the beautiful reality of the “Word-made-flesh,” the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who, “in the fullness of time,” was sent for our salvation.

Even the best efforts to be more reflective and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ can get lost in the expectations of how Christmas “should be.” In my last column, I included a selection of a letter from a woman who called it quits: she said, “NO MORE!!!” to all the consumerism and running around. What did she hope for from all this?

“I’m hoping and praying with all of my heart, that things will be different, that there will be a true reason for celebrating once again.”

It sounds a little bit like the theme of the movie, “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” when Charlie Brown cries out, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” Then Linus responds, “Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about. ‘And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round

about them: and they were so afraid. And the Angel said unto them, “Fear not:” for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the Manger.”

And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”

“That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

Can it really be that simple? Absolutely.

It all flows from the choices that we make on how we will celebrate the mystery of the “Word Made Flesh.” Light the candles of the Advent wreath and sing an Advent

song. Celebrate the beautiful feasts that flow from Christmas Day and let them enhance your celebration. I encourage those who are able to

attend the Masses after Christmas, including the Feast of St. Stephen, Dec. 26; The Feast of St. John the Apostle, Dec. 27; and the Holy Innocents, Dec. 28. Look for those special ways to celebrate the **12 days of Christmas, December 25 – January 5**, leading up to the Feast of Epiphany. Included in the 12 days of Christmas is the Feast of the Holy

I encourage those who are able to attend the Masses after Christmas, including the Feast of St. Stephen, Dec. 26; The Feast of St. John the Apostle, Dec. 27; and the Holy Innocents, Dec. 28.

Family, Dec. 31. Find a nice family activity that everyone can share in and start a new family tradition. What would happen if you held off giving gifts on Christmas Day and offered gifts instead on the Feast of Epiphany (Jan. 7), to symbolize the gift-giving of the three kings?

Again, the Christmas Season you will experience flows from the choices you make and whether or not the feasts and celebrations of the Church are included. Choose wisely!

NEW YEAR OF LIFE

As we face the New Year, many may say “good riddance” to 2023! Wars have escalated around the world and there is no lack of violence, drugs, and disorder in our nation’s urban areas. Strife and discord seem to abound. Civility in public discourse has pretty much disappeared as we demonize those who think differently from us. This is all the more evidence that we need a Savior, if for nothing else than to save us from ourselves. But Jesus offers us so much more: the fullness of life in this world and the promise of eternal life in the next. Let us follow the example of the Magi and come and adore the newborn king. I remind everyone of the beautiful tradition of visiting the manger scene during the Christmas Season and, where possible, take a piece of straw to put in your wallet or purse so that throughout the coming year, it will remind you of Christmas. Bethlehem means “city of bread.” Let us grow in our love for Jesus in the Eucharist. May our adoration never cease!

“O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine.” ©TM

LITURGICAL NOTES for CHRISTMAS & JAN. 1

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT/SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Questions have arisen regarding the Masses for the **Fourth Sunday of Advent** (Dec. 24) and the **Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord**. Please note that the Scripture readings and prayers for the anticipatory Mass on Saturday (Dec. 23) and the Sunday morning Masses on Dec. 24 are taken from the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The Scripture readings and prayers offered on the evening of Sun., Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve) are taken from the Vigil Mass of Christmas OR the Mass during the Night, when the Mass is offered later in the evening. The faithful are reminded that there is an obligation of Mass attendance attached to both the Fourth Sunday of Advent as well as the Christmas Mass (since Christmas itself is a Holy Day of Obligation). In short, a person cannot attend Mass on Sunday evening and have it fulfill the obligation for both Sunday and Christmas. The obligations are distinct from one another.

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Please note that since January 1 falls on Monday this coming year (2024), it is **NOT** a Holy Day of Obligation, though it retains its liturgical rank as a Solemnity. While the faithful are not obligated to attend Mass on this day, they are still strongly encouraged to attend Holy Mass to celebrate this Mystery of our Faith regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pastors should provide the faithful with the opportunity to attend Mass on Jan. 1, even though the obligation is abrogated.



5TH
ANNIVERSARY

CONGRATULATIONS



Fr. Andrew Williams

Fr. Andrew Williams will celebrate the 5th anniversary of his priesthood ordination on Dec. 14. He is a Sacramental Priest for St. Ann Parish, Carthage, and Sacred Heart Parish, Webb City; Faculty member and Lead Chaplain of McAuley Catholic High School, Joplin; Chaplain for Mercy Joplin, and a Regional Vocations Promoter for the diocese.



Happy Anniversary, Fr. Williams!



VEN Y VERÁS

Obispo Edward M. Rice

¡Enraícen sus actividades en el verdadero sentido de la Navidad!

A medida que nos acercamos a la Navidad y a las fiestas navideñas, les ofrezco mis oraciones y un recuerdo especial durante todas nuestras hermosas celebraciones. A menudo, los días posteriores a la Navidad nos dan tiempo para detenernos y reflexionar sobre la hermosa realidad de la “Palabra hecha carne”, la Encarnación, la Segunda Persona de la Santísima Trinidad que, “en la plenitud de los tiempos”, fue enviada para nuestra salvación.

Incluso los mejores esfuerzos por ser más reflexivos y preparar nuestros corazones para la venida de Cristo pueden perderse en las expectativas de cómo “debería ser” la Navidad. En mi última columna, incluí una selección de una carta de una mujer que se dio por vencida y dijo: “¡¡¡BASTA!!!” a tanto consumismo y correrías. ¿Qué esperaba ella de todo esto?

“Espero y rezo de todo corazón para que las cosas sean diferentes, para que vuelva a haber un verdadero motivo de celebración”.

Suena un poco como el tema de la película “La Navidad de Charlie Brown”, cuando Charlie

Brown grita:

“¿No hay nadie que sepa de qué se trata la Navidad?”.

Entonces Linus responde:

“Claro, Charlie Brown, puedo

contarte de qué se trata la Navidad. En esa región acampaban unos pastores, que vigilaban por turno sus rebaños durante la noche. De pronto, se les apareció el Ángel del Señor y la gloria del Señor los envolvió con su luz. Ellos sintieron un gran temor, pero el Ángel les dijo: «No teman, porque les traigo una buena noticia, una gran alegría

para todo el pueblo: Hoy, en la ciudad de David, les ha nacido un Salvador, que es el Mesías, el Señor. Y esto les servirá de señal: encontrarán a un niño recién nacido envuelto en pañales

y acostado en un pesebre».

Y junto con el Ángel, apareció de pronto una multitud del ejército celestial, que alababa a Dios, diciendo:

“¡Gloria a Dios en las alturas, y en la tierra, paz a los hombres amados por él!” “De eso se trata la Navidad, Charlie Brown”.

¿De verdad puede ser tan sencillo?

Absolutamente. Todo fluye de cómo decidimos celebrar el misterio de la “Palabra hecha carne”. Enciendan las velas de la corona de Adviento y canten una canción de Adviento. Celebren las hermosas fiestas que se desprenden del

día de Navidad y dejen que estas realcen su celebración. Animo a los que puedan a asistir a las misas después de Navidad, incluida la

fiesta de San Esteban (26 de diciembre), la fiesta de San Juan Apóstol (el 27) y los Santos Inocentes (el día 28). Busque esas formas especiales de celebrar los **12 días de Navidad, del 25 de diciembre al 5 de enero**, que conducen a la Fiesta de la Epifanía. Los 12 días de Navidad incluyen la Fiesta de la Sagrada Familia, el 31 de diciembre. Encuentren una

actividad familiar agradable que todos puedan compartir y comiencen una nueva tradición familiar. ¿Qué pasaría si no hicieran regalos el día de

Navidad y los hicieran el día de la Epifanía

(7 de enero) para simbolizar los

regalos de los Reyes Magos?

Una vez más, el tiempo de Navidad que ustedes vivan dependerá de

lo que elijan y de si incluyen o no las fiestas y celebraciones de la Iglesia.

¡Elijan bien!

NUEVO AÑO DE VIDA

De cara al nuevo año, muchos dirán “hasta nunca” a 2023. Las guerras se han intensificado en todo el mundo y no faltan la violencia, las drogas y el desorden en las zonas urbanas de nuestro país. Parece que abundan las luchas y las discordias. El civismo en el discurso público ha desaparecido prácticamente a medida que demonizamos a quienes piensan de forma diferente a nosotros. Esto es una prueba más de que necesitamos un Salvador, aunque sólo sea para salvarnos de nosotros mismos. Pero Jesús nos ofrece mucho: la plenitud de la vida en este mundo y la promesa de la vida eterna en el otro. Sigamos el ejemplo de los Magos y vengamos a adorar al Rey recién nacido. Recuerdo a todos la hermosa tradición de visitar el pesebre durante el Tiempo de Navidad y, en la medida de lo posible, recoger un trozo de paja para guardarlo en la cartera o el bolso, de modo que durante todo el año que viene nos recuerde la Navidad. Belén

significa “ciudad del pan”. Crezcamos en nuestro amor a Jesús Eucaristía. ¡Que nuestra adoración no cese nunca!

“Oh Sacramento Santísimo, Oh Sacramento Divino, toda la alabanza y toda la acción de gracias sean en cada momento tuyos.” ©TM



Dec. 24 - Dec. 31, 2023

CHRISTMAS CALENDAR

Bishop Edward M. Rice

SUN., DEC. 24

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT / CHRISTMAS EVE

11 p.m. St. Agnes Cathedral, Springfield

MON., DEC. 25

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD / CHRISTMAS

8 a.m. St. Agnes Cathedral, Springfield

WED., DEC. 27

FEAST OF ST. JOHN, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST

7:20 a.m. Mass
Launch Year of the 350th
Anniversary of Apparitions of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque at St. John Parish, Leopold

SUN., DEC. 31

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY / NEW YEAR'S EVE

11 p.m. Holy Hour & Midnight Mass for Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God

Bishop Emeritus John Leibrecht

MON., DEC. 25

CHRISTMAS DAY MASS

11 a.m. Immaculate Conception Parish, Springfield



Another Walk Through: ‘Walking Together’

by Bishop Emeritus
John J. Leibrecht

Before his retirement in 2008 as the Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Bishop John Leibrecht wrote a standing column in *The Mirror* entitled, “Walking Together.” At the end of each article, Bp. Leibrecht would normally share a funny story referencing his travels to the schools, or time with friends, family, or other bishops. *The Mirror* has decided to share a few of these in an ongoing series entitled, “Another walk through: ‘Walking Together.’” We hope you enjoy them.

April 27, 1990 I asked a woman who came into the Church at the Easter Vigil, “How long have you been thinking about becoming Catholic?” She responded, “About 25 years!” After a pause, she added, “I’m not one to rush into things, am I?” I told her the old story about comedian Jack Benny, who was well known as a penny pincher with his money. A man put a gun to Benny and demanded, “Your money or your life!” Benny was silent. The robber shouted, “I said ‘Your money or your life!’” Benny said quickly, “I’m thinking! I’m thinking!”

May 4, 1990 One junior-high student asked another, “Why does your grandmother always seem to be reading the Bible when we stop by to see her?” The girl replied, “I’m not sure, but maybe she’s cramming for her finals.”

May 18, 1990 I asked second-graders who had just made their first Communion what was so wonderful about first Communion. A little girl quickly responded, “You receive Jesus!” After a pause, she added, “And lots of presents!”



By
Fr. Joshua
J. Whitfield

WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 33: *Baptism and Our Life in Christ*

In chapters 5 through 8 of his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul offers a beautiful description of baptized life. Reading through those chapters will teach you all you need to know about baptism. Here are the salient points.

After Paul talks about faith in Christ — how when we have faith in Christ, hope is given and the Holy Spirit is “poured into our hearts” (Rom 5:5) — he talks about baptism. And the first thing he does, echoing the Gospels, is to identify baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He writes, “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). This means, quite simply, that the believer’s death is bound to Jesus’s death, and Jesus’s resurrection is, in turn, shared with the believer. “For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection” (Rom 6:5). By faith and by baptism, we unite ourselves to Christ. In this way, his death becomes ours and his resurrection becomes ours, too. In other words: Jesus’s destiny becomes our destiny. His trajectory becomes our trajectory, so to speak. Thus, when we come to our death, it’ll be Jesus’s death, too. And his resurrection becomes ours. To quote the Eucharistic Preface prayed at funerals, for the faithful, “life is changed not ended” (Roman Missal, *Preface I for the Dead*). And that’s because, having died with Christ in baptism, we live with him in resurrection.

But this attachment to Jesus begun in baptism is also moral. This means that not only is the believer’s death united with Christ’s death, and not only is his resurrection shared with the believer, but the morality of Jesus becomes the believer’s morality. Forgiven of their sins, believers take on Jesus’s values and vision (Col 2:12-13). Very quickly after Paul talks about the theological reality of baptism, he begins to talk about the moral reality of baptism, about what “newness of life” means (Rom 6:4). For the baptized, “sin must not reign.” The baptized must not “obey their desires.” The bodies of the baptized are no longer to be “weapons for wickedness” but “weapons for righteousness,” because sin should no longer have any power over believers (Rom 6:12-14).

This doesn’t mean believers know nothing of moral struggle. Baptism allows for moral struggle — one need

only read Romans 7 to see this. What Paul is saying in this passage has been interpreted in various ways. However, one way to read it — as St. Augustine and also the Catholic Church came to read it — is to read Paul’s words



(CNS photo/Lisa Schulte, Catholic Voice)

autobiographically. That is, it’s likely Paul here is speaking about what we call “concupiscence,” about the internal conflict between the law of God and the law of flesh — two laws at war in each of us, a battle fought within us even after baptism. “I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of the God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle as war with the law of my mind” (Rom 7:22-23). It’s a war each of us knows, a war that goes on our whole life long, but which has an end in Christ’s eternal mercy. Baptism doesn’t remove this war from believers, nor does it magically remove our freedom. Rather, this passage explains how baptism offers hope to the moral struggle, reminding us who will ultimately win the believer’s moral battles — not the believer, but Christ in the believer. “Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Paul cried out (Rom 7:24-25).

What we’re talking about here is what the Church calls “original sin,” which is only sin in an analogous sense. Original sin names simply the just state of affairs pertaining to humankind after the first sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. It simply refers to the fact that because of human sin we are justly incapable of holiness — incapable of heaven, so to speak. Through baptism, Christ, however, removes that incapacity. But it doesn’t remove either our weakness or freedom. Concupiscence remains; the moral battle still rages — but now with hope. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church

puts it, “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle” (No.

405).

Baptism gives the believer the grace — that is, the Spirit — necessary for real moral growth. With baptism, the believer is given both the opportunity and the grace to win the moral fight; that is, the condemnation of original sin is removed, and the Spirit is given. “Hence, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” Paul writes. He’s talking about the baptized, those “in Christ.” Christ condemned “sinful flesh” by assuming its likeness, by means of his death and resurrection. And, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, those who are baptized can “live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit” (Rom 8:1-5). What baptism does for the believer is it opens a new spiritual and moral horizon. It doesn’t eliminate from the believer’s moral struggle at all, but it offers the believer hope, the promise that sin won’t win in the end. For me, I’ve always been comforted by this, and by the fact that this was written by an apostle. I’ve also always found comfort in the Church’s teaching about original sin and concupiscence because it’s realistic, yet hopeful. If Paul can struggle morally yet still hope and still go on, then so can I. And so can you.

To summarize the basic theology of baptism: In baptism, we are united to Christ; we are in Christ. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). We share in Christ’s life; we become sons and daughters of the Father, each of us in the Son. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, that’s why Jesus is not ashamed to call us “brothers,” because we have been consecrated in Christ and now share

his “origin” (Heb 2:11). This explains Paul’s beautiful words in the letter to the Romans, at the end of his chapters on baptism, about believers’ unbreakable union with Christ. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul asks.

Anguish? Distress? Persecution? No, nothing will. Not even an angel nor any other power “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35-39). This is not sentimental gibberish but pure theology. What makes it possible for Paul to say that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ is baptism. These are not empty feel-good words. Only in faith and baptism is this passage made real for the Christian. This is the truth that made martyrs brave and fearless of death. Fearless, because they knew they couldn’t be separated

from Christ. Which also, as a rather significant aside, is why a Christian is baptized once because the union made in baptism is so perfect and unbreakable (cf. Eph 4:5).

This is why the Catechism says that baptism is “the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit.” Because it’s very much a birth into new life. It’s a true spiritual regeneration and the “door to the other sacraments,” which we’ll explore as this series progresses (Catechism, No. 1213). For now, it suffices here to say simply that this is how the Christ who through his body, the Church, and through the Scripture and Tradition not only speaks to us but now touches us — through water and Holy Spirit.

NEXT EDITION: WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 34

Baptism in the Early Church

Father Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of *The Crisis of Bad Preaching* (Ave Maria Press, \$17.95), and other books.

“What We Believe, Part 33: Baptism and Our Life in Christ by Fr. Whitfield is from *SimplyCatholic.com*, copyright © Our Sunday Visitor; all rights reserved, no other use of this material is authorized.





Protecting God's Children[®]
For Adults

The VIRTUS Protecting God's Children Safe Environment training for adults is available online.

Preregistration is necessary: If you are a new registrant please go to www.virtus.org and click on "first time registrant" on the left, and follow the prompts to register for Online training. Instructions for the registration process can also be found on the Child and Youth Protection Page of the diocesan Website.

www.dioscg.org/wp-content/uploads/How-to-Register-for-a-VIRTUS-withOnline-Option.pdf

Both in-person and online training sessions are for adults only.

Before engaging in activities involving minors and/or vulnerable adults, new volunteers or employees are required to complete the VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children* training for adults, submit a current Background Disclosure and Authorization Form, and read, sign and submit the annual Code of Conduct, which are available on the VIRTUS Website and the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau Child and Youth Protection Webpage: www.dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/

For more information, please contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection, childandyouthprotection@dioscg.org; or Bill Holtmeyer, billholtmeyer@dioscg.org; or Shelly Ferry, sferry@dioscg.org, (417) 866-0841.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lebanon—St. Francis de Sales Parish will offer a **Eucharist Revival seven-week study, "Jesus and the Eucharist,"** beginning Wed., Jan. 10, 2024, 9:45 a.m., or an evening class at 6 p.m., in the Mumford building basement, located at 345 Grand Ave. For more information, contact Elizabeth Hempel, (417) 531-1399.

Leopold—**St. John PCCW Country Christmas Home Tour** will be held Sun., Dec. 17, 1-4 p.m. Tour five beautifully decorated homes, stop by St. John Catholic Church to listen to organ music, followed by soup and cookies served in the cafeteria. For questions or tickets, contact Geri Geringer at (573) 208-6445. Proceeds from this event are shared with St. John Youth Group.

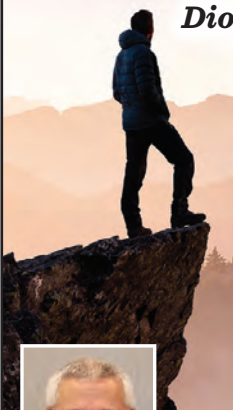
Springfield—Come and be present before our Lord during **Springfield's Area Perpetual Adoration.** Hosted at Holy Trinity Chapel, there is an urgent need of Adorers on Wednesdays, 7 p.m.; and Saturday, 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. Substitutes are needed for all hours. For more information, or to sign up, please contact Marilyn Gibson at (417) 224-4043. Please consider spending time with our Lord in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. **Adoration will suspend for the Christmas holiday beginning Wed., Dec. 20, at 8 a.m. and will resume Tue., Jan. 02, 2024, at 1 p.m.**

Springfield—**Praise & Worship Prayer Group** offers a great opportunity to come together in praise, fellowship, inspired teaching, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This group meets every Thursday, 6:30-8 p.m., in St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, located at 2200 W. Republic Rd. All are welcome so please join us! For more information, contact Shelly Pichler at (417) 838-2730.

Parishes and organizations are invited to submit notices of future events to be printed on a space-available basis. There is no fee.

Courage and EnCourage

Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau



Faithful to the teaching and pastoral guidelines of the Roman Catholic Church, **EnCourage** is a ministry dedicated to the spiritual needs of parents, siblings, adult children, and other relatives and friends of persons who identify as LGBTQ+, or who experience same-sex attractions, or gender discordance. **Courage** is a ministry that offers pastoral support and fellowship opportunities to men and women experiencing same-sex attractions or gender discordance, who choose to live a chaste life.



If you are experiencing same-sex attractions or gender discordance, or if you know of someone who is struggling with these experiences, contact the diocesan chaplain, Deacon Al Stoverink, at southernmccourage@gmail.com or call/text him at (573) 987-0551. You can also access information resources and help through the Courage International Website at www.couragerc.org, or by contacting the Courage International Offices at office@couragerc.org or (203) 803-1564.

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ATTENTION: ADULT CATHOLIC MEN

You are invited to the Southeast Missouri...



CATHOLIC MAN NIGHT
Men Meeting Jesus

Wednesday, January 17 | 6:30-9:00 pm
St. John Henry Newman Center, Cape Girardeau, MO

An evening of Adoration, Confession, & a Manly Meal with discussion to follow.

To help plan for food, please **RSVP to SEMOCatholicManNight@gmail.com** 'SEMO Catholic Man Night' on Facebook or text 573-275-5214



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IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS...PARADE STYLE!



▲ **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH**, Jackson, recently won the Grand Marshall Award for "best float" in Jackson's Christmas Parade with their impressive nativity scene float. A round of applause goes to Amanda and Robert Holzum for the float construction, and to everyone who participated! (Submitted photo)



▲ **ST. DENIS CATHOLIC SCHOOL**, Benton, had a jolly good time at their parade this past weekend. (Submitted photo)



▲ **ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI PARISH**, Nixa, was working hard in Santa's Workshop in the Nixa Christmas parade, supervised by The Very Rev. Shoby Chettyyath, V.G., pastor. (Submitted photo)



▲ **SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOL**, Poplar Bluff, lit up their local Lighted Christmas Parade with angels! (Submitted photo)

LIVE NATIVITY

EXPERIENCE THE TRUE REASON FOR THE SEASON!

Friday, December 15
5 - 7 pm

Near the Saint Francis Cancer Institute (Entrance 6)

Hosted By
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By George Weigel

The Catholic Difference

BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS 2023

Advent-2023 is as short as Advent can be, so this annual column on Christmas gift books that will inspire, entertain, inform, or all of the above comes a bit earlier than usual; it also includes oldies-but-still-goodies as well as newer releases.

Tom Holland's *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (Basic Books) has done more to challenge the regnant secular myths about the development of our civilization than any other recent volume. As the dust jacket puts it, succinctly, "Christianity is the principal reason why, today, we think it nobler to suffer than to inflict pain; why we assume every human life has equal value." Holland is an accessible writer, so *Dominion* makes the perfect gift for that off-to-college youngster.

The Theology of Robert Barron, by Matthew Levering (Word on Fire Academic). One of America's finest younger theologians explores the thought of one of the US Church's most dynamic leaders while exploding the silly notion that doing theology today involves repeating abstract formulas from the past. Bishop Barron drives that point home himself in *Light from Light: A Theological Reflection on the Nicene Creed* (Word on Fire Academic); Synod-2023 would have been vastly improved if its discussions had wrestled with this compelling explication of Christian faith rather than slogging through its turgid *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document).

Nigel Biggar and I don't agree on everything, but I will say without hesitation that he is one of the most

fearless of academics in confronting the woke plague corrupting higher education throughout the western world. *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning* (William Collins) is the latest example of Biggar's sturdy scholarship,

readability and courage — a book that cost Oxford's Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology emeritus endless grief when *les enfants terribles* of the Cancel Commissariat took exception to this thoughtful and balanced assessment of an important historical phenomenon. The focus is on the British Empire, but the lessons are applicable to other

experiences of colonization for both colonizers and colonized.

Erik Varden, author of *Chastity: Reconciliation of the Senses* (Bloomsbury Continuum), is the bishop of Trondheim in Norway and the former abbot of a Trappist monastery in Leicestershire. His blog, *Coram Fratribus* (Among Brethren), is a steady source of insight and a primer in literary craftsmanship. Now, in *Chastity*, Bishop Varden explains just why that much-misunderstood

virtue is a matter of living what John Paul II called "the integrity of love." The book doesn't release in the US until Jan. 2, but you can pre-order it now — perhaps in tandem with Bishop Varden's earlier works, *The Shattering of Loneliness: On Christian Remembrance* and *Entering the Twofold Mystery: On Christian Conversion*, both published by Bloomsbury Continuum.

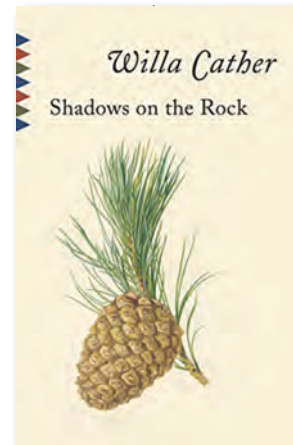
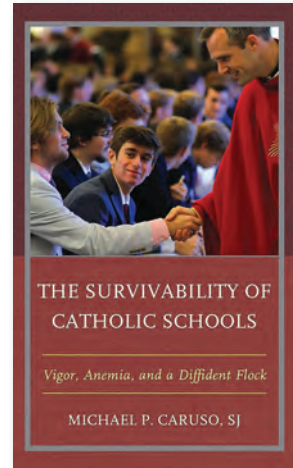
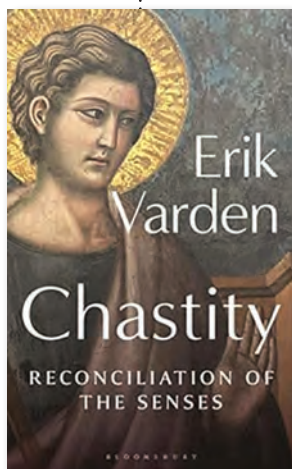
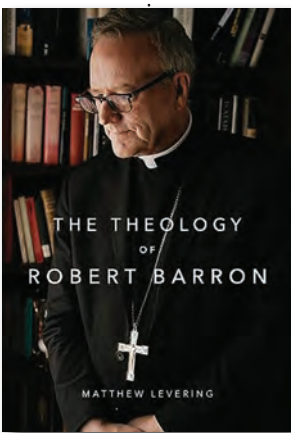
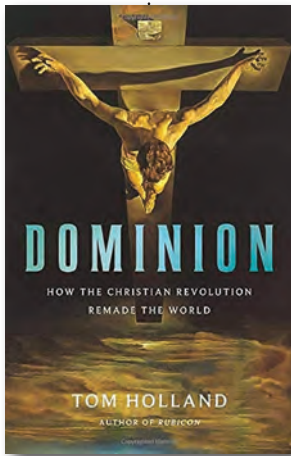
There are many challenges in American Catholicism today, but the resolution of one will likely have a tremendous impact on the wider society — and especially on the children of the inner-urban poor, who are cannon fodder in the teachers' unions' quest for wealth and power without accountability. In *The Survivability of Catholic Schools: Vigor, Anemia, and a Diffident Flock* (Rowman & Littlefield), veteran Catholic educator Michael P. Caruso, SJ, explores the many facets of meeting that challenge with insight born of experience.

Aidan Nichols, OP, is one of the most productive theologians in the Anglosphere and, like Robert Barron, a living refutation of certain misconceptions about theology now regnant in Rome. His *Conciliar Octet: A Concise Commentary on the Eight Key Texts of the Second Vatican Council* (Ignatius Press) was invaluable when I was preparing *To Sanctify the World: The Vital Legacy of Vatican II* (Basic Books); he's also the only person who has ever made Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry make sense to me (*Hopkins: Theologian's Poet* [Sapientia Press]). Now comes *Apologia: A Memoir* (Gracewing), in which Fr. Nichols recounts his personal, spiritual, and intellectual journey in a readable volume that also serves as a useful history of modern Catholic contentions.

Tired of the antics of John Fetterman, Marjorie Taylor Green, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Matt Gaetz, and the other caterwauling brats in the congressional playpen? Remind yourself that giants once walked the land by savoring *Affection and Trust: The Personal Correspondence of Harry S. Truman and Dean Acheson, 1953-1971* (Knopf). These two robust patriots never seemed to understand that Dwight D. Eisenhower was a crafty politician and serious statesman, but they got a lot else right; Acheson was also a master stylist, whose wit and bite are equally amusing and bracing.

And then there is Willa Cather's *Shadows on the Rock* (Vintage), a fitting way to mark that great storyteller's sesquicentennial and to be reminded of the sacramental sensibility that infuses her work.

George Weigel is a Distinguished Senior Fellow and William E. Simon Chair in Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. George Weigel's column 'The Catholic Difference' is syndicated by the Denver Catholic, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Denver.




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How to celebrate a CATHOLIC CHRISTMAS

By Amy Welborn

OSV News

For Catholics, great feasts like Christmas don't come at us out of the blue: In the secular world, "Christmas" seems to start in October! However, our approach to this holiday as Catholics must be different, and it can be. We can put aside the worldly calendar; we can allow the ancient, rich tradition of the Church to surround and center us instead. And then, we will be enriched by truly celebrating a Catholic Christmas.

"God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that he makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendor. He comes as a baby—defenseless and in need of our help," Pope Benedict XVI preached in his homily for Midnight Mass in 2006. "He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: So he makes himself a child."

A child is coming: As for any birth, we must prepare. The Advent season is a gift, rich with opportunities to ready our lives for the embrace of our Savior.

One powerful way to prepare for the gift of Jesus is to turn away from the outside noise and pressure and take a few quiet moments to pray with the Church. Use your church bulletin (or visit <https://bible.usccb.org>) to look up the Mass readings for each day. If you can, take time to attend daily Mass; use it as a period of refreshment in the midst of the busyness all around.

Even during our most hectic times, we can still "watch and wait" with the Church. Everything else that we do during Advent can echo what we hear in God's Word and the Church's prayer. Our Advent wreaths and Jesse Trees are physical reminders of the coming light and the prophecies fulfilled. When we celebrate the sacrament of penance & reconciliation, we acknowledge our darkness and need, and rejoice in the light of forgiveness offered through the Child.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Joining our thoughts and prayers to those of the communion of saints whose feasts occur during this season—Ambrose, Lucy, John of the Cross, Juan

Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, and others—helps us hear John the Baptist's call along with these holy men, women and even children who have gone before us in faith. Just as they heard and responded, so can we.

During this season, we twice celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose openness to God models our own patient Advent waiting. On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), we celebrate the truth that she was conceived without sin. On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12), we celebrate Mary's appearance to the indigenous St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin ("Talking Eagle") in Mexico in 1531.

St. Nicholas of Myra's feast Dec. 6 is celebrated in many European countries as a day to share gifts—often candy, and often placed in shoes. As Europeans immigrated to the United States, various St. Nicholas traditions combined and emerged as Santa Claus. Sharing the story of the real St. Nicholas can help us emulate the generosity of his faith-filled life, which is in turn an expression of God's own generosity and the gift of Jesus.

When Christmas arrives, we have spent four weeks preparing for the Child. At last, the day to celebrate arrives: The Father has answered our prayers, sending his Son as one like ourselves, humbly immersing himself in human life and speaking words we can understand, inviting us to love.

'CHRIST'S MASS'

At Christmas, we celebrate God's gift of Jesus to the world. The very name of the day and the season—"Christ's Mass," derived from the Old English way of speaking of it—places Jesus, present to us in the Eucharist, at the center of the day. Might this Christmas be the

beginning of a closer friendship with Jesus, nurtured by the Eucharist?

There are actually four different Masses for Christmas: the Vigil, Midnight Mass, Mass at Dawn and Mass During the Day. Each has a distinct theme and different readings, reflecting the richness of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Even though most of us will attend only one Mass at Christmas, it's a beautiful custom—and well worth our while—to meditate on the Mass readings from the others as well.

This can deepen our appreciation for what God has done for us and the whole world in Christ.

Christmas is rich with symbols. We put up Christmas trees, Nativity sets and lights, all beautiful in their own right—and all symbolic of the deeper, richer dimensions of meaning that our faith brings to this season.

Christmas trees, being evergreens, speak to us of God's eternal life and love, embodied in Christ. They also recall the tree in the garden through which sin came into the world, and the tree of the crucifixion by which that sin was conquered. Saying a prayer as we put up our tree, and making sure that some of our ornaments evoke the Nativity, can help bring this "home" to us.

The Nativity scene, or *crèche* ("crib" in French), was popularized by St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century out of a desire to bring home the reality of the humility and love of Christ. Setting out the Nativity scene—saving the Child for Dec. 25 and the Magi for Epiphany—can be natural moments for prayer and reflection.

WHAT GIFTS CAN WE GIVE?

God gives the world his Son, who dwells among us, filling us with a love that must

be shared. So we, on Christmas, give gifts. Contemplating the examples of gift-givers like the Magi, St. Nicholas, and King Wenceslas can bring a new perspective to our own actions. Who is in greatest need, and what gifts can we give?

Many families have already discovered the joy of giving of themselves to others on Christmas Day: seeking out shut-ins, visiting residents of nursing homes or hospital patients, or serving the poor and the homeless. They reach out, as God reaches out to us in Christ. We can consider other alternatives as well: supporting charities in the name of our friends, or encouraging our families to center their gift-giving energies on those less fortunate in order to give as Christ has given to us.

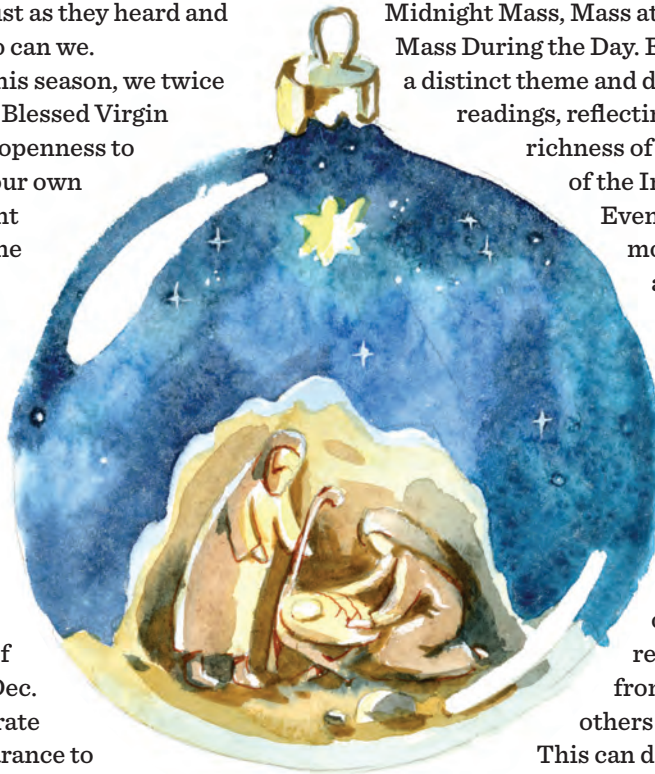
We know as Catholics that Christmas isn't over Dec. 26. Even just those first few days after Christmas invite us to continue to open our hearts to the Christ Child and what he brings: There's the challenge of discipleship (St. Stephen Dec. 26), the beauty of the Word Made Flesh (St. John the Evangelist, Dec. 27), the reality of opposition to Christ (the Holy Innocents Dec. 28) and the blessing of family (Holy Family, the Sunday after Christmas).

PEACE & BLESSINGS

Jan. 1 is the beginning of a new calendar year, but that's not the reason we celebrate it as a feast. On the Roman calendar, New Year's Day is both the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and a day of prayer for peace. We make all sorts of resolutions for a new year, but alongside those efforts, we say a different sort of prayer. God has come to us, not in overwhelming power, but in humility as a child. So, on this day, we pray that the new year might be marked by humility and peace, brought by Christ and modeled by Mary.

The Solemnity of the Epiphany, traditionally observed Jan. 6 (the day following the familiar "Twelve Days of Christmas"), is transferred to a Sunday in the United States. "Epiphany" means "manifestation," and it's the celebration of Jesus manifesting his glory as Savior to all nations of the world (symbolized by the Magi).

Epiphany is a gift-giving day in some



CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

cultures, as well as a day to ask for God's blessings on our homes. One particular blessing includes bracketing the initials of the traditional names of the Magi who visited the home of Jesus—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar—with the year above the front entry door, usually in chalk, like this for 2023: 20+C+M+B+23.

In the scope of the universal Church, past and present, the Christmas season actually has two endings:

In the old Roman calendar, the feast of the Presentation Feb. 2 marked the end of the Christmas season. On this day, also called Candlemas, candles are blessed as a symbol of Simeon's recognition of the infant Jesus as the light to the Gentiles, and as a way to bring the light of Christ home to burn all year. Even today, the Christmas tree and crèche in St. Peter's Square in Rome remain on display

until Candlemas.

Likewise, the Baptism of the Lord, celebrated the Sunday after Epiphany, commemorates the final "Christmas" feast of our present Roman calendar. As we hear


the Scriptural account of the Father revealing the divinity of Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River, we celebrate our own baptism, our "new birth" in Christ and inclusion in his body, the church.

For

Catholics, Dec. 25 is only the beginning of the celebration of Christmas. As others pack away the decorations, we continue to celebrate the gift of Christ, ever present for us in the Eucharist—a continual manifestation of God's loving care for us all year long. ©OSV

Amy Welborn is a freelance writer living in Birmingham, AL. She is the author of many books on faith and spirituality for children, teens and adults. Her website is AmyWelborn.com.

“MIGHT THIS CHRISTMAS BE THE BEGINNING OF A CLOSER FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS, NURTURED BY THE Eucharist?”



Congratulations!
Fr. Mark Binder

Fr. Mark Binder, retired, was recently awarded the Distinguished Alumni of the Year from Conception Seminary College, in northern Missouri. The award was given to him for the ongoing work he does to support Camp Re-NEW-All summer programs, which he helped co-found in 1974.

Distinguished Alumni 2023 Award
Conception Seminary College



Vocations events draw young adults interested in discernment

Cape Girardeau, MO

Saint John Henry Newman Center, Cape Girardeau, recently hosted two vocations events on the evening of Oct. 30: a Project Miriam Dinner for women and a Project Andrew Dinner for men. These occasions provide young men and women the opportunity for prayer, fellowship, and a meal with area consecrated religious, Bishop Edward Rice, and clergy, who avail themselves to answer questions and /or discuss their own personal discernment stories.

The Project Miriam Dinner was attended by Congregation of the Poor Clare Missionary sisters Sr. Lety de Alba, MC; Sr. Rosio Alcantar, MC; and Sr. Nelly Rivera, MC, who serve in Sacred Heart Catholic School, in Poplar Bluff. Young women that attended

included Katte Dittmer, Veronica Beek, Becky Kitchen, Maya Coleman, and Adelynn Rackers.

Sister Rivera shared her vocational experience as a religious missionary working in evangelization and education.

For the Project Andrew Dinner, Bishop Edward Rice spoke about discernment to the priesthood and not being afraid to say yes to the call that God is making to us in our lives. The Andrew Dinner was attended by Noah Coleman, Grant Eudy, Jared Koehler, Damian Criddle, Dalton Criddle, Joseph R. Green, Peyton Lintner, Nathaniel Gilpin, Mark Schuchard, Joe Prost, and Andrew Signaigo.

Father Jesse Hiatt, Fr. Rick Jones, Fr. Laurent Okitakatshi, and Fr. Alex Sutachan also attended the dinner, sharing their call to diocesan priestly life and their experiences as priests. ©TM

FORMER PASTOR DIES IN INDIA

Springfield, MO

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau has received word that **Fr. Augustine Lourduswami**, of the Diocese of Nellore, India, died Dec. 5, 2023 of a massive heart attack. He was age 53. Father Lourduswami served in the Diocese as Parochial Vicar (Associate Pastor) of St. John Vianney Parish, in Mountain View, and St. Mary Parish, West Plains, from Nov. 16, 2012 to July 1, 2015. He was then named Pastor of St. John Vianney Parish, Mountain View, and St. Sylvester Mission Church, Eminence, where he served in that capacity until July 6, 2017. May he rest in peace. ©TM



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▲ **NATIONAL CATHOLIC YOUTH CONFERENCE (NCYC)**—Lucas Oil Stadium, in Indianapolis, Nov. 16-18, 2023, held some 12,000 youth for the 2023 National Catholic Youth Conference. “We are the ‘now’ of God,” said Aux. Bishop Joseph Espallat of New York, homilist at the closing Mass on Nov. 18. “NCYC we are counting on you: Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world.” (*OSVNews*)



Bishop tells 12,000 youth at NCYC: Jesus ‘left us the best party’ — the Eucharist

By Sean Gallagher

Indianapolis

The joyful shouts of 12,000 Catholic teens from across the country echoed loudly during the two-hour closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Espallat of New York described the scene well during his homily in which he often led a loud call-and-response dialogue with the youths.

“Jesus, my sisters and my brothers, left us the best party! He left us the Eucharist,” Bishop Espallat shouted. “This is the party par excellence, man! You’ve got a front seat, buddy! This is good news!”

The congregation responded immediately with a deafening, “Amen!”

“Did you hear that? I think that was louder than a Colts game,” said Bishop Espallat from the floor of the stadium where the city’s NFL team plays its home games.

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, MN, was the principal celebrant of the Mass. He was joined by 17 concelebrating bishops, including Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and more than a 100 concelebrating priests.

While Bishop Espallat had many moments of fun and laughter during his homily, he also gave important messages to his listeners to take with them as they returned to their homes across the country.

The first was that they were called to put “joy over fear.”

In explaining this, Bishop Espallat distinguished between a “worldly fear that creates panic and anxiety” and “a holy fear, or fear of the Lord, (that) is a source of peace and happiness.”

“If we love God and know that we are loved by God, then why do we need to fear?” he asked his listeners.

Bishop Espallat then laid out three simple points he wanted the young people at NCYC to take home with them.

“You’ve got to have faith,” he said. “You’ve got to have fun while you do it. And you need family and friends and community along the way.”

Bishop Espallat added that the faith to which he exhorted the youths involved more than simply affirming that God exists.

“It’s not just about believing in God,” he said. “It’s accepting what God gives us, especially through the



▲ **MEMBERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI PARISH, Nixa,** enjoyed a session during the 2023 NCYC in Indianapolis. (*The Mirror*)

church, and then responding by our actions by how we treat each other and the way we live.

“Faith is critical because it leads us to joy. And joy overcomes worldly fear because it leads us outside of ourselves.”



▲ **ST. JOHN PARISH, Leopold, and ST. ANTHONY MISSION CHURCH, Glennon,** at NCYC 2023. (*The Mirror*)



▲ **HOLY TRINITY PARISH, Aurora,** attendees at the 2023 NCYC explored downtown Indianapolis. (*The Mirror*)



▲ **NATIONAL CATHOLIC YOUTH CONFERENCE (NCYC)**—The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau had 164 pilgrims “Fully Alive,” at the NCYC in Lucas Oil Stadium, in Indianapolis, Nov. 16-18, 2023. This included youth, adult chaperones, priests, clergy and religious. The diocesan Youth Endowment Fund assisted 157 diocesan pilgrims with assistance toward registration costs: **Thank you donors!** (The Mirror)

During his homily, Bishop Espaillat quoted from Pope Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), in which the pontiff wrote that all believers have the “mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (No. 273).

Regarding the blessing mentioned by the pope, Bishop Espaillat asked his listeners with a smile to raise their hands if they knew how to curse at people.

Many in the stadium predictably raised their hands.

They also cheered loudly after Bishop Espaillat told them that “if you know how to curse, you know how to bless. If you know how to curse, you are following what the enemy wants you to do. That’s what the devil wants. But God doesn’t want you to curse. God wants you to bless. So, instead of cursing somebody out, we need to bless people up.”

In closing his homily, Bishop

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE...



▲ **PRIESTS ON A MISSION**—Father William Hennecke, Jr., of Our Lady of the Cove Parish, Kimberling City, and Fr. Nick Zummo got in the spirit during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) Nov. 16-18, where over 12,000 converged in Lucas Oil Stadium to be inspired to be sources of peace, happiness, and love. Each has the “mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing, and freeing,” said homilist Bishop Espaillat, of New York, quoting “The Joy of the Gospel,” (No 273), at the closing Mass. (The Mirror)



By Sean Gallagher Indianapolis

For Gareth Colburn, a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg in the Indianapolis Archdiocese, the time of Eucharistic adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium Nov. 17 during the National Catholic Youth Conference “was the most moving adoration experience I’ve ever had.”

He said he hoped the adoration that night would help all the teens at the stadium “turn closer to God and grow closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Colburn, a senior at Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg, spoke about the experience afterward with *The Criterion*, Indianapolis archdiocesan newspaper.

Earlier, before some 12,000 youths from across the country at the stadium showed their love for Christ in the Eucharist during adoration, Colburn offered a witness talk.

He grew in his appreciation of the Eucharist and the Church’s liturgy through taking part twice in “One Bread One Cup,” a summer youth liturgical leadership program of St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, in St. Meinrad.

Colburn shared with his Catholic peers how he was afraid in the past to share his faith with his non-Catholic friends because of how they ridiculed him for it.

One Bread One Cup and his parish helped change him, he said.

“I’m here to tell you tonight, don’t worry about ... what anyone else has to say about your relationship with your Lord, because that’s what’s most important,” Colburn said. “Be steadfast in faith and your love for the Lord. I implore you. When you go home from this place, go to your home parish, your family and even your schools and show the love that a Catholic community like this one has to offer. It’s beautiful and everyone deserves it.”

From the start of the conference the day before, the Blessed Sacrament had been exposed in a monstrance for adoration in a chapel in the Indiana Convention Center adjacent to the stadium.

During the evening general

session of NCYC Nov. 17, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat of New York carried the monstrance in a procession from the convention center to the stadium where he placed it on an altar for all 12,000 youths to see and adore.

Before the Eucharist was brought to the stadium, Dominican Sr. Jude Andrew Link gave a reflection that helped the youths prepare for adoration.

“When you and I go to Mass, bread and wine are brought up and offered to God. And he changes them into himself,” Sr. Jude Andrew said. “Then, in the very same spot where we brought up the bread and wine, we now receive Jesus Christ.”

“When that happens at Mass and the bread and wine are offered up to God, offer yourself,” she said. “I promise you, if you offer yourself, your whole self to God, he will transform you. It’s what he does. He makes all things new.”

Adoration featured a homily by Bishop Espaillat and contemporary Christian meditative music played by the house band. While they played Matt Maher’s song, “Lay It Down,” Bishop Espaillat invited the youths to place themselves entirely before Jesus present with them in the Blessed Sacrament.

Youths came from their seats higher up in the stadium to get as close to the stage as possible. As they prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, many knelt, others stood with their hands raised in prayer, and a handful laid prostrate on the stadium floor.

After the music and homily, Bishop Espaillat invited the youths to move to silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

“At this moment, just let this beautiful silence reign in this arena right now,” he said. “We’ve laid it down. But what does God say to us? Let’s spend a couple of moments in deep silence, in penetrating silence, and let God speak to us. ... There’s beauty in the silence.”

The band stopped playing. And the stadium was entirely silent.

Afterward, Bishop Espaillat presided over Benediction before taking the Blessed Sacrament from the floor of the stadium. ©OSV News



▲ **ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL, Springfield at NCYC 2023.** (The Mirror)



▲ Father Nick Zummo joined the happy pilgrims at NCYC from **ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON PARISH**, Springfield. (The Mirror)

NCYC // CONTINUED...

Espaillet called his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

“We are the ‘now’ of God,” he said. “NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world.”

A long, loud cheer filled the stadium in response to Bishop Espaillet’s call. As the cheer died down, the bishop gave a parting blessing: “God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you’re doing it. And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you.”

The raucousness of the 35-minute homily later gave way to quiet, emotional, and heartfelt prayer during Communion as the house band played such popular contemporary Christian meditative songs as “Yeshua” and “Lord, I need you.”

As the Mass closed, the rejoicing returned, with flashlights on smartphones lighting up the floor and stands in the stadium. When the closing procession was over, the band began playing upbeat music and teens rushed forward to celebrate as close to the stage as they could get.

Zach Spahr, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis, was proud that

so many of his Catholic peers from across the country had come to celebrate their faith.

“There are a lot of times when I think that Indy is not really the best place,” Spahr said in a concourse of the stadium after the liturgy. “But then you see something like this and it’s like, ‘What a great place to live.’ There’s a little bit of pride.”

He spoke about how he, as a Catholic, sometimes feels alone at North Central High School in Indianapolis where he’s a student.

“So, seeing that there are so many other Catholics across the country is important to me,” Zach told *The Criterion*, newspaper of the Indianapolis Archdiocese.

The jubilation of the 12,000 young Catholics at the closing Mass confirmed that conviction in Ean Nelson, a sophomore from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

“It was something like I’d never seen before,” he said of the closing Mass. “It’s something that I’ll never forget. It was cool being able to see that I’m not alone.”

For Ean, NCYC “was life-changing.”

“I’m going to be more aware of myself, more happy and full of the Lord.” ©OSV News

Sean Gallagher is a reporter at The Criterion, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.



▲ Fr. Alex Sutachan and a group from **ST. VINCENT DE PAUL PARISH**, Cape Girardeau, at NCYC. (The Mirror)



▲ Attendees from **ST. EUSTACHIUS PARISH**, Portageville in front of the NCYC, Lucas Oil Stadium signage. (The Mirror)

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SUNDAY, FEB. 4, 2024, 1:00 P.M. ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, CAPE GIRARDEAU **SATURDAY, FEB. 10, 2024, 1:00 P.M. ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL, SPRINGFIELD**

Couples celebrating their 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, 50th, or 50+ anniversary anytime during 2024, please pre-register for one of the two Diocesan Wedding Anniversary Celebrations and receive a Marriage Anniversary Certificate from Bishop Rice. In addition, those celebrating their 25th or 50th anniversaries will receive an Episcopal Blessing and a special gift from Bishop Rice.

Join us for Mass with Bishop Edward M. Rice, followed by a reception with light Hors D'oeuvres, cake, and punch. These occasions enable all of us to celebrate and affirm the great gift of marriage within our communities. **Please make plans to attend!**

For us to properly prepare, we ask that couples **RSVP by January 19, 2024.** Register by scanning the QR code, or go to the Family Life page at dioscg.org

SCAN QR CODE TO REGISTER

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Poverty Incarnate: The inspiration behind St. Francis' Nativity crèche

By Junno Arocho Esteves

Rome

Every year, the Vatican unveils a Nativity scene from a different diocese, often using materials or artistic styles from the particular region or country where the diocese is located.

As different as they seem, they have a very traditional background—and a famous saint that started them in 1223—St. Francis of Assisi.

The first crèche was created centuries ago in the central Italian village of Greccio. **In 2023, the crèche celebrates its 800th birthday.**

Italian Franciscan Fr. Simone Castaldi, secretary of the Franciscan Province of St. Bonaventure in Rome, said the commemoration of both anniversaries “are a wonderful opportunity to place the witness of Francis of Assisi back at the center of Christian spirituality.”

“Francis is a simple figure with an incredible story of deep and embodied spirituality,” Fr. Castaldi said. “Everyone talks about St. Francis but few people know the profound experience, which moves mainly from his love for the Incarnation.”

First Nativity

The story of how the first Nativity scene came to be can be found in the hagiography written in 1229 by Franciscan Bro. Tommaso of Celano, who was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX to write about St. Francis' life.

For St. Francis, Bro. Tommaso recounted, “the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion so occupied his memory that he would scarce ponder over anything else.”

According to the Franciscan brother's account, St. Francis, before making his way to Greccio to celebrate Christmas, sent word to Giovanni Velita, a friend and mayor of the town, and instructed him to prepare a recreation of the Nativity.

“Make haste to go before and diligently prepare what I tell thee,” St. Francis said, according to Bro. Tommaso. “For I would make a memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes his infant hardships; how he lay in a manger on the hay, with the ox and the ass standing by.”

For Polish Franciscan Fr. Emil Kumka, an expert on early and medieval church history, as well as Franciscan history and hagiography, at Rome's Pontifical Theology Faculty of St. Bonaventure, also known as the Seraphicum, the aforementioned

passages in Bro. Tommaso's account are the key to understanding St. Francis' inspiration for creating the Nativity scene.

“The humility of God, who wanted not only to become man by natural birth, but first and foremost his choice of poverty and lowering to our human level, provoked in St. Francis the desire to relive this moment,” said Fr. Kumka.

“The conditions in Greccio had to be the same as in Bethlehem, namely extreme poverty, which fully demonstrates the divine ‘kenosis,’” he added, referring to St. Paul's words in which explains that Christ “emptied himself” in taking on human form.

While St. Francis is “a saint that everyone knows,” Fr. Castaldi said, it often happens that “almost no one really understands him,” especially when it comes to understanding his motivations for creating the Nativity scene.

“It is true that on that Christmas night 1223, Francis depicted a scene of the Nativity for the first time in history,” he said. “But we cannot fail to consider that what Francis does is something much more profound than just making the first crèche.”

The Eucharist & the Incarnation

In his account, Bro. Tommaso also described the joy felt by St. Francis, as well

as by those in the small Italian village who witnessed that Christmas celebration so long ago.

“There simplicity was honored, poverty exalted, humility commended; and of Greccio there was made as it were a new Bethlehem,” he wrote. “The night was lit up as the day, and was delightsome to men and beasts. The people came, and at the new mystery rejoiced with new rejoicings.”

Father Kumka said that St. Francis' creation of the Nativity scene was “not spectacle, not religious theater, nor sentimentalism; that is, everything that the Nativity crèche often represents to people today.”

Instead, he explained, the Christmas Mass celebrated with a physical representation of the Son of God lying in a humble manger, joined together two important points of devotion in St. Francis' own spiritual life: the Eucharist and the Incarnation.

Both, Fr. Kumka said, “referred back to the same basic choice: that of a God who humbled himself for the salvation of humankind.”

“The Eucharist perpetuates Christ's presence in history and demands, at the same time, that—like

Christ—we know how to dispossess ourselves of everything,” he said. “The Christmas liturgy of Greccio does not remain fixed on what happened in Bethlehem, but follows Jesus all the way to Golgotha and recognizes him as the one who is risen and glorified, and who today again stoops down and gives himself to us in holy Communion.”

Father Castaldi echoed similar sentiments and emphasized that in the simplicity and humility of the manger, St. Francis wanted to “show a way of being in the world: that of the peace that comes from being in the minority, from occupying the last place.”

“This is the revolution that he will bring into history by breaking the feudal pyramidal hierarchy and replacing it with the circle of brotherhood, in which everyone is on the same level,” Fr. Castaldi said.

“In the night of Bethlehem, Francis saw how God made the first move: He chose to occupy the last place.”

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Junno Arocho Esteves writes for OSV News from Rome.



FRANCIS OF ASSISI—A statue of St. Francis of Assisi, patron of animals and the environment, is pictured in a garden at a community in Austin, Texas, Sept. 9, 2021. On Christmas night 1223, Francis depicted a scene of the Nativity for the first time in history. The Christmas Mass celebrated with a physical representation of the Son of God lying in a humble manger, joined together two important points of devotion in St. Francis' own spiritual life: the Eucharist and the Incarnation. (OSV News-CNS Photo/Bob Roller)

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: DEC. 12 Patroness of the Americas



La Virgen De Guadalupe

I cannot dream the wicked night away
Until your gaze from once upon a hill
Falls on me like rose petals on the sill
Of the window through which I kneel and pray.
Not every star contains the light of day.
I count and count and lose my place, and still
Your loving smile, my Mother, calms until
This soul is charged with light to find its way.
The saint, the holy man, believed in you
Our Savior neath your stellar gown, aware.
Then roses fell onto the floor like dew
That snuffs the fires demons stoke with vile care.
How many souls now safe in Heaven? You
Our Lady, know each by name, here and there.

Larry Cataldo, Sacred Heart Parish, Springfield

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2024

50th ANNIVERSARY

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SESSIONS

1C JULY 8-12
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3C JULY 22-26









Fr. Mark Binder, Co-Founder of Camp Re-NEW-All

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Beginning at 3:30 pm on 12/13/23



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

2024 DYC

Into the Deep

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23 @ 6PM - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24 @ 5:30PM
VIETNAMESE MARTYRS RETREAT CENTER
CARTHAGE, MO

FRIDAY, APRIL 19 @ 6PM - SATURDAY, APRIL 20 @ 5:30PM
PINECREST CAMP & CONFERENCE CENTER
FREDERICKTOWN, MO

All Catholic teens in 7th-12th grade are invited to DYC: Into the Deep.



DYC: INTO THE DEEP IS A CONFERENCE WITH A RETREAT FEEL LED BY YOUNG ADULTS WHO ARE SHARING THEIR PERSONAL FAITH EXPERIENCE WHILE TEACHING ABOUT LIVING A LIFE IN CHRIST. TEENS WILL PARTICIPATE IN FUN GAMES, SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, PRAYER, DISCUSSION, AND MORE.



REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS MONDAY OF THE WEEK OF THE CONFERENCE

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Wishing You and Your Family a very Blessed Christmas



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 Christmas Collection in your local parish*

Please be generous in your support to the 2023 Christmas Collection at your local parish.
 Few things are more important for the future of the Church than supporting the young men who
 respond to the call of Christ to become priests and for us to attend to the needs of our elderly priests.