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BY JENNIFER BARTON

Mourning, prayer and a resolve to rebuild follow devastating tornadoes

MAYFIELD, Ky. (CNS) — Mourning, prayer and a resolve to rebuild shattered lives, homes and businesses in Mayfield followed one of the most powerful twisters in U.S. history that leveled the city of 10,000 in western Kentucky overnight Dec. 10.

The Bluegrass State was the worst hit as numerous devastating tornadoes traveled across it and its neighboring states of Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri, leveling entire communities.

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Debris surrounds a badly damaged church in Mayfield, Ky., Dec. 11 after a devastating tornado ripped through the town. More than 30 tornadoes were reported across six states late Dec. 10 and early Dec. 11, killing dozens of people and leaving a trail of devastation.

Helping others in greater need

Our Lady of Hungary students put charity into practice

Volunteerism and helping others in need continue to be hallmarks of Our Lady of Hungary High School students.

A group of 30 students traveled to El Salvador over spring break to deliver food and medical supplies to a health clinic and orphanage.

The students spent their time working on a variety of projects, including building a school, painting buildings, repairing homes and even helping the children study.

Students also spent time with the orphans, playing games, reading and sharing food and clothing.

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Bishop celebrates Our Lady of Loreto with Sisters of the Holy Cross

IN TRUTH AND CHARITY
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

The following is the text of the homily delivered by Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades at Mass on the Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto Dec. 10 at the Church of Our Lady of Loreto, Notre Dame.

Three years ago, Pope Francis added today’s feast to the universal calendar of the Church as the optional memorial of Our Lady of Loreto. I imagine you were very happy when you heard this news, since your chapel here is under the title of Our Lady of Loreto and the first permanent chapel on this site Mary’s campus was the Holy House of Loreto. The Holy House of Mary in Nazareth was a place of pilgrimage and worship since the early centuries of the Church. The emperor Constantine and his mother, St. Helena, had a basilica built around it in the year 313. When the Christians were driven out of the Holy Land in the late 13th century, the Holy House disappeared and ended up in Croatia and eventually in Loreto, Italy. Some believe that angels transported the house there. Others believe that it was brought over by ship. In either case, archaeologists have studied it and testify that the stone is indeed from Palestine, as are minute bits of pollen found in the stone. There is graffiti on the stone that matches graffiti in the ruined basilica built by Constantine. Also, the measurements of the remains of the foundation at the Annunciation which took place in her humble home in Nazareth, what we now call the Holy House of Loreto. The shrine in Loreto recalls the great mystery of the Incarnation. So many who visit there do so to consider the “fullness of time” when God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” That woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, received God’s Son in her womb at the Annunciation which took place in her humble home in Nazareth, what we now call the Holy House of Loreto. The shrine in Loreto recalls the great mystery of the Incarnation. So many who visit there do so to consider the “fullness of time” when God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” That woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, received God’s Son in her womb at the Annunciation which took place in her humble home in Nazareth, what we now call the Holy House of Loreto. The shrine in Loreto recalls the great mystery of the Incarnation.

The Word became flesh and Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, is the privileged channel through which God came to dwell among us. Mary offered her very body. She placed her entire being at the disposal of God’s will and became the place of His presence, a place of dwelling for the Son of God. In her, heaven and earth were united. Mary herself became God’s holy house, a temple where the Most High dwells.

When I think of your consecrated life as Sisters of the Holy Cross, I think of how, when you consecrated your lives to the Lord and made your perpetual profession of vows, you opened your hearts to the Lord, wishing to offer your lives as His dwelling place. You continue to do so through your lives of prayer and service in the Church. When our lives are His dwelling place, the Lord frees us from being closed in on ourselves. When we imitate Mary, we do not thirst for power, possessions and domination. We learn that our lives have meaning and are fulfilled through the gift of self, the gift of love.

The Advent season is truly a Marian season. On this memorial of Our Lady of Loreto, our minds and hearts again turn to Mary, the Mother of God, the purest image of the Church. May the Lord who lived in the humble house of Nazareth, and in the Holy House of Loreto, fill you with the grace of God. May we follow her example of faith and humility that is so pleasing to God!

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Your church here, and especially the Holy House of Loreto chapel on this campus, are sacred places where you also contemplate the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation. Sisters of the Holy Cross, since the beginning, together with your founder, Blessed Basil Moreau, have had a strong and loving devotion to the Mother of God. It’s no wonder that the early sisters here had the Holy House built on this campus and then named this chapel Our Lady of Loreto. The humble home of Our Blessed Mother, now in Loreto, Italy, is a physical, tangible witness to the greatest event in human history, the Incarnation. The Word became flesh and Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, is the privileged channel through which God came to dwell among us. Mary offered her very body. She placed her entire being at the disposal of God’s will and became the place of His presence, a place of dwelling for the Son of God.

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In these next two weeks, may our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Loreto, help us by her prayers to enter more and more into the mystery of the Incarnation and experience with her and St. Joseph the deep joy of Christmas!
Pope: Through Mary, Latin America can move toward conversion, renewal

BY JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Festive music, dancing and prayers in honor of Mary echoed through St. Peter’s Square as hundreds gathered to commemorate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The sounds of Mexican mariachi brought much needed warmth on a chilly Roman morning Dec. 12 to honor the patroness of the Americas and the Philippines whose apparition to St. Juan Diego on Tepeyac hill in Mexico continues to bring hope in uncertain times.

“This experience must be repeated over and over again,” Pope Francis told pilgrims during his Sunday Angelus address.

“In this way, God, who is communion, will move us toward conversion and the renewal of the church and of society that we need so much in the Americas — the situation in many Latin American countries is very sad — as well as throughout the world.”

Waiting to hear the pope’s words, pilgrims stood near the famed obelisk in the center of the square where a large replica of St. Juan Diego’s tilma, which bears the image of Mary, stood adorned with white roses and surrounded by the flags of all the countries of Latin America.

Among those present to mark the feast were Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, and Venezuelan Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, substitute secretary for general affairs in the Vatican Secretariat of State.

Several pilgrims were dressed in traditional Indigenous clothing while others reenacted the moment when, in 1531, St. Juan Diego unfurled his mantle and revealed the miraculous image of Mary.

After the recitation of the rosary in Spanish, Portuguese andFilipino, Cardinal Ouellet led pilgrims in a final prayer for Mary’s maternal intercession so that she would help all Christians “to see the face of Jesus in every person, especially in those most excluded and marginalized.”

“Preserve the peace in our peoples and move the hearts of the violent, so that their hate may end, and they may find in your son the path to transform their lives,” he prayed.

Seeing the many flags from Latin America from the window of the Apostolic Palace, the pope addressed the pilgrims in Spanish and welcomed those “who from Alaska to Patagonia, Chile and Argentina to Patagonia, together. They performed both Latin chant and traditional songs under the direction of Jeremy Cole, director of sacred music for St. Joseph.

The church was filled with worshippers for the solemnity, and a dinner was held afterward in the Mishawaka Catholic School building. At the dinner, Cole played selections honoring St. Joseph based on readings from Father Calloway’s book and written by the director of music at St. Bavo, Joseph Higgenbotham.

Father Lapp commented that having the bishop visit was “a beautiful way to conclude the Year of St. Joseph.” He parish completed the consecration to St. Joseph in October to coincide with the anniversary of the church’s dedication.
Doctors: Advances since Roe confirm abortion ‘takes life of unborn child’

BY JODI MARLIN

(CNS) — At 15 weeks’ gestation, a fetus responds to touch. The neurotransmitters and nerves needed to process and transmit pain signals have formed, and most of the spinal column has hardened into bone.

As early as 21 weeks, the fetus can survive outside the womb.

None of these realities were known in 1973, when a case came before the Supreme Court that would ultimately give a mother the right to abort her unborn child.

During the past 50 years, advances regarding the biological genesis of humans have disproven the basis on which the court, in Roe v. Wade, presumed a lack of justifiability of a ban on abortions — except for the sake of the life of the mother — that was in place in the defendant’s home state of Texas.

The court’s 1973 decision legalizing abortion nationwide rested on the use of the word “person” in the 14th Amendment, which protects the mother’s privacy.

Notably, there was great disagreement over when an unborn child becomes a living being whose rights compete with those of the mother.

Since then, techniques in research tools and prenatal surgery, advancements in viability and the proliferation of support options for mothers with unexpected pregnancies have conspired to erode many of the arguments in the case — Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization — Dec. 1.

Fifty years ago, expectant parents could barely see their unborn child in the womb because ultrasound technology was fairly new and rudimentary, Sander Lee explained.

Now, ultrasound technology gives physicians better and faster diagnostics and new tools that can not only detect, but when appropriate, even treat malformations of the unborn.

“So, there’s this whole development of what we call the perinatal revolution, where you can actually perform surgery on the unborn fetus,” she told Catholic News Service.

While the original ultrasound images were static and black and white, 3D and real-time images are the norm today.

“We can see in real time the baby move, and with absolute clarity,” said Sander Lee. As early as 15 weeks, even whether the fetus is favoring their right or left hand, Dr. Kathleen Raviele, past president of the Catholic Medical Association and an OB-GYN, added that doctors and their physicians can see the fetal heartbeat by six weeks, observe the movements of the baby, assess the anatomy and determine his or her sex far earlier than could have been done just two generations ago.

“So those involved in abortion cannot say this is a ‘blob of tissue’ — they know this is a baby, and that abortion takes the life of an unborn child,” she said.

In an amicus brief filed in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the Catholic Medical Association and co-filers expressed the opinion that the court should “extricate itself from the arbitrary line-drawing that Roe and Casey engaged in while attempting to settle the abortion controversy. … Any arbitrary line that the court might seek to replace the viability cut-off with would simply amount to yet another act of judicial legislating.”

Viability is complex and understanding of it was flawed and incomplete in 1971, the brief states.

“Casey” referenced in the brief is Casey v. Planned Parenthood, the high court’s 1992 decision that affirmed Roe and also stressed that a state regulation on abortion could not impose an “undue burden” on a woman “seeking an abortion before the fetus attains viability.”

The culmination of five decades of medical and research advancements rests in the simple truth that during pregnancy, there are at least two patients, said Sander Lee.

“We have the unborn child, who is a separate patient from the mother,” she said. “So we need to treat both patients, and our ability to do that has come miles since Roe.”

A nearly 50 years of legalized abortion in the U.S., the emotional scars and the hardened hearts of all the mothers who have had abortions and their grandparents and siblings of those aborted children have had a devastating effect on families and society, said Raviele.

“Our only hope for recovering our humanity as a country is to stop taking innocent unborn lives and provide the pregnant woman with the support she needs to carry her child to term.”
their city and all of those affected by the ferocious mid-December twisters came from far and wide, including from Pope Francis and the U.S. Catholic bishops, and from close to home, Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, whose diocese covers western Kentucky.

A papal telegram conveyed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said Pope Francis “was saddened to learn of the devastating impact of the tornadoes” in the Midwest and the South.

“He offers heartfelt prayers that almighty God will grant eternal peace to those who have died, comfort to those who mourn their loss, and strength to all those affected by this immense tragedy,” it said.

“With gratitude for the tireless efforts of the rescue workers and all engaged in caring for the injured, the grieving families and those left homeless, Pope Francis invokes upon all engaged in the massive work of relief and rebuilding the Lord’s gifts of strength and generous perseverance in the service of their brothers and sisters,” said the telegram, which Cardinal Parolin sent to Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio in the U.S.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, said the destruction and devastation was “heartbreaking” and called for prayer and assistance for all those who were in the path of the storms.

“During this Advent season we all await in joyful anticipation for the birth of our Lord, we pray for those who have been injured, for those who have lost their lives, and for their grieving families and communities,” said Archbishops Gomez and Coakley. “May those who have been impacted by these storms find peace, comfort and hope in our faith and in God’s endless love.

“We also pray for the emergency responders and those who have begun the work of providing for the needs of the impacted in these communities in the recovery efforts,” they said in a statement issued late Dec.

11. “We entrust all our brothers and sisters in harm’s way to our Blessed Mother, and we ask for her continued protection and for her intercession in comforting those who are suffering.”

Two prelates urged Catholics and all people of goodwill to donate to recovery efforts and financial help for tornado victims by supporting the work of Catholic Charities USA: catholiccharities.us/campaign/ccusa-disaster-relief/c55051.

Bishop Medley in a Dec. 11 statement called on the Catholic community of the diocese “to unite in prayer... for all of the suffering that was caused by this disaster.” He asked all parishes to take up a special collection over the Dec. 11-12 weekend to aid tornado victims.

The bishop also took note of the leveling of Mayfield’s candle factory, where 110 employees were working around the clock, which is customary during the Christmas season, according to news reports.

Initially, city officials feared the death toll among factory workers would reach 70. Late Dec. 12, a company representative told reporters that eight workers were confirmed dead and eight remained missing, but the rest had been accounted for.

“Many of those injured in the Mayfield candle factory were parishioners, and others represented migrants and the marginalized in our communities,” Bishop Medley said in his statement.

He added that through its Catholic Charities office, the diocese planned “to offer immediate help and services” for those displaced by the tornado and/or need immediate emergency financial help.

“I am proud of the many ways that your generosity always allows the Catholic Church to respond to the suffering and to families in crisis,” Bishop Medley said. “So I thank you in advance for your generous response to this terrible devastation. God will bless your generosity.”

In a Dec. 12 tweet, Bishop Medley said he visited the Catholic community of St. Joseph Church in Mayfield. “Fr. Eric Riley, the pastor, preached on the Advent and Our Lady of Guadalupe themes of hope and joy. Neighboring parish St. Jerome of Fancy Farm welcomed them.”

At a news briefing Dec. 12 in Mayfield, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear noted one tornado traveled 227 miles. “It didn’t take a roof, which is what we’ve seen in the past. It exploded the whole house. People, animals... just gone.”

“The very first thing that we have to do is grieve together,” he said, “and we’re going to do that before we rebuild together.”

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Knights’ documentary on St. Joseph available to view for free

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (CNS) — The Knights of Columbus made its latest documentary, “St. Joseph: Our Spiritual Father,” available to view for free at kofc.org beginning Dec. 8 to coincide with the end of the Year of St. Joseph. “St. Joseph teaches us that we really find ourselves when we live for others,” said Patrick Kelly, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus. “He models for each one of us the importance of prayer, obedience and courage in our lives. The Knights of Columbus is very pleased to offer this inspiring documentary for all to watch and to discover in St. Joseph a powerful example and intercessor,” he said in a Dec. 7 statement. Produced to increase devotion to the foster father of Jesus, protector of the Holy Family and patron of the Catholic Church, the film premiered on ABC affiliates across the United States this fall. After its six-week broadcast run, the Knights announced the film would be made available for viewing online. It features reenactments, interviews with scholars “and inspiring witness stories” that provide an opportunity to learn about Joseph from a historical perspective and show “how devotion to him can be life-changing,” the Knights said in a news release.

Restoration at Church of the Nativity shows what cooperation can do

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (CNS) — When restoration on the Church of the Nativity’s wooden beams and leaking roof began in 2015 with the blessing of the three custodial churches, everyone involved was aware of the historic significance of the venture. It was the first time in 540 years that any repair work was done on the church on the site where Jesus was born. But what the team of workers — including local Palestinian contractors and engineers and international restoration experts — did not know was the true impact of the initial ecumenical cooperation. Historically the Franciscans, Greek Orthodox and Armenians had vigorously guarded their rights in the church, under the 1852 Status Quo agreement that regulates the ownership of spaces in various holy sites as well as the times and duration of religious liturgies. As recently as 2011, Greek Orthodox and Armenian monks came to blows over cleaning rights in a certain area in the church. But with the leaking of the roof endangering the ancient structure, all agreed to undertake the necessary work. And a new era began. “Along the way the three churches noticed the good results that were coming from the cooperation and that it would be good to continue,” said Khouldoud Dairbas, the new executive director of the Bethlehem Development Foundation, which has raised $2.6 million out of the $15 million needed for the restoration of the entire church. “At first it was just supposed to be the roof, but then we continued to do much, much more,” she said.

Disability or chronic illness does not make life less sacred, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Every human being is precious and has a value that does not depend on what he or she has or on his or her abilities, but on the simple fact that he or she is a person, the image of God, Pope Francis said. “If disability or illness makes life more difficult, it is no less worthy of being lived, and lived to the full. After all, who among us does not have limitations and does not, sooner or later, come up against limitations, even serious ones?” he said during an audience Dec. 13 in the Vatican’s Paul VI hall. The pope was speaking to staff and students of the Seraphic Institute of Assisi, which specializes in education, rehabilitation and care for children and young people with disabilities; the institute was celebrating its 150th anniversary. “The most important thing is the spirit with which you all dedicate yourselves to this mission,” Pope Francis told them. “It is clear to you, as it should be to everyone, that every human person is precious, has a value that does not depend on what he or she has or on his or her abilities, but on the simple fact that he or she is a person, the image of God,” he said.

Using ‘holidays’ instead of ‘Christmas’ isn’t inclusive, cardinals say

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Dropping references to Christmas in favor of “winter holidays” in official European Union communications was an idea that was not meant to offend but did and could even push some Christians toward right-wing populist political parties, said Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg. The cardinal, president of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union, told reporters at the Vatican Dec. 10 that the best way to make Europe more inclusive for members of all religions “is not to put religion in the sphere of the private, but to give all religions access to the public space.” In late October, Helena Dalli, the EU equality commissioner, distributed a 50-page internal handbook for making official EU communications more inclusive. An Italian newspaper published excerpts in late November, setting off a firestorm of criticism, particularly over Dalli’s reminder that not all Europeans celebrate Christmas and that even those who do don’t all celebrate on the same day since some who follow the Julian calendar celebrate in January. Dalli withdrew the handbook in late November, promising to revise it. Still, Pope Francis was asked about it Dec. 6 during his news conference with reporters on his flight back to Rome from Greece. The idea of not talking about Christmas, he responded, is “an anachronism,” reminiscent of the dictatorships of days gone by, including the communists.

Court keeps Texas abortion law in place, allows challenge to continue

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Supreme Court said Dec. 10 that it would hear arguments next March on whether the District Court should resolve this litigation and enter appropriate relief without delay, he wrote. The Texas abortion law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, went into effect Sept. 1. During oral arguments about it Nov. 1, the justices considered whether the Justice Department and state abortion clinics can even challenge the abortion law in federal court because of the way the law was set up with citizens’ enforcement. This was the third time the nation’s high court considered the Texas abortion law. On Sept. 1, it ruled against blocking it and on Oct. 22, it said the law would remain in effect before its expedited review Nov. 1. Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, said in reaction to the court’s Dec. 10 decision: “Today the court ruled on a procedural issue without addressing the merits of the case challenging the Texas Heartbeat Act.”

Boy and Girl Scouts bring Peace Light to US

Cub Scout Jotham Andres, 9, poses with a lantern using a flame transferred from the International Peace Light during a welcoming ceremony following the Peace Light’s arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Jamaica, N.Y., from Vienna Dec. 11. Boy and Girl Scout leaders, along with other volunteers, form a network to drive the flame — which originated in the grotto of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank — to houses of worship, homes and other venues across North America.

Biden urge over health care funding for poor

AUSTIN, Texas (CNS) — The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops has asked President Joe Biden and Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra to end a stalemate between state officials and the federal agency overseeing Medicaid payments that is threatening health care for low-income Texans. Addressing what they described as “an urgent issue,” the prelates Dec. 3 sent the letters explaining that without an agreement covering reimbursements, “children, elderly, disabled residents and those living in poverty throughout our state risk losing access to critical care.” The reimbursements ended Sept. 1 when a Texas law took effect blocking it and on Oct. 22, it said the law would remain in effect before its expedited review Nov. 1. Sponsoring the Senate’s reconciliation bill, President Biden signed the letter in a sign of unified support for reinstating the health care support plan.
**AROUND THE DIOCESE**

**Synod on Synodality underway in parishes**

As part of the synodality process, after each Mass at St. Augustine Church the weekend of Dec. 11-12, both adults and children met in small groups to discuss where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church and St. Augustine Parish. A Zoom meeting, a survey and one-on-one conversations will help reach parishioners who are not comfortable meeting in person due to worries about COVID-19.

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**Vatican releases text for installing catechists, explains ministry**

BY CINDY WOODEN

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Catholic men and women formally installed in the new ministry of catechists are not simply religious education teachers but are engaged in “the proclamation and transmission of the faith, carrying out this role in churches of long-standing tradition. Moreover, individual ecclesial experiences also produce very different characteristics and patterns of action, so much so that it is difficult to give it a unitary and synthetic description.”

In different parts of the world, he said, formally recognized catechists can be found “guiding community prayer, especially the Sunday liturgy in the absence of a priest or deacon; assisting the sick; leading funeral celebrations; training and guiding other catechists; coordinating pastoral initiatives; human promotion according to the Church’s social doctrine; helping the poor; fostering the relationship between the community and the ordained ministers.”

The pope’s institution of a formal ministry of catechists, he said, also should not end the practice of all a parish’s school’s religion teachers being formally ordained ministers, it is a particular situation of the lack of a stable presence of ordained ministers, it is a participation in their pastoral action.

“Those who carry out a role exclusively for the members of an ecclesial movement” since that role is assigned by leaders of an ecclesial movement “unless the charism is catechesis — unless they belong to Institutes whose charism is catechesis — unless their affiliation with the Catholic Church and, indeed, to strengthen their own sense of their ethnic heritage.”

**Documentary on stained glass at ND basilica to air**

SOUTH BEND — PBS Michiana — WNIT has produced a documentary on the history and significance of the stained glass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. “Vibrant Light: Stained Glass of the Basilica at the University of Notre Dame” premieres Saturday, Dec. 18, at 9 p.m. on PBS Michiana — WNIT.
Rorate Caeli Mass honors the faith of Mary

BY CHRISTOPHER LUSHIS

A

vent is a time of waiting, anticipating and keeping vigil for the coming of the Lord. For many, these preparations are often accompanied by candlelight, which illuminates homes with a representation of the true light soon to arrive at Christmas.

A little-known Catholic tradition that emphasizes this visual effect within the liturgical life of the Church is the Rorate Caeli Mass, offered in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary during Advent.

As the Mass is offered before dawn, the Rorate Mass gets its name from the opening antiphon, “Rorate, caeli, desuper, et nubes pluant justum, aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatorem,” which translates to, “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain on the just, let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior.”

Said before dawn, the Rorate Mass gets its name from the opening antiphon, “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain on the just, let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior.”

As the Mass approached, in the seemingly most perfect expression of the material world reflecting the love of heaven, it became noticeable that the sun outside was just beginning to shed its light on the world. With the elevations of the Sacred Host and Precious Blood, the brightness of the sun outside pierced through the windows with the dawn, and the entire chapel was filled with the warm glory of morning.

He continued, “the Lord, the true rising light of the world, will illumine my heart and yours, right here in this place, as much as He already has in various other times and places. Are we ready to receive this light?”

“Advent renews every year this centuries-long expectation,” said Father Degasperi. “The Church invites us to observe closely the Virgin Mother of Nazareth, in her house, prayerfully awaiting the Messiah. Today, we ask her to let us draw close to her as we contemplate the mysteries and miracles taking place in her. Most of all, let us ask her to give us her hunger and thirst for the Messiah who is to come at Christmas, that she may share with us her burning love for God and her ardent desire to see Him born once again in our midst.”

“As many times as there are days in the year, as many times as we will watch a sunrise happen, as many times as that light will shed upon us and warm our hearts, Christ desires to enter in to find your heart to be another manger as at Christmas or another womb as at the Annunciation,” Father Koehl further emphasized. “At all the comings of Christ, He desires to find your heart in a place of perfect reverence, ready to receive Him when He comes. And so, as much as this is a Mass of Our Lady, it is certainly also a Mass of Our Lord; it is a Mass remembering the truth of the coming of the light of the world at Christmas.”

Father Koehl encouraged all Catholics to personally examine whether, like Our Lady, they are cultivating a daily life of prayer, communicating that love back to the Lord which He first gave to them, and praying with Mary, who knew Him best, to know Him in a deeper and more heartfelt way. “Let us continue to follow after the star in the East, just as certain Magi did, in a desire that that light should illumine our hearts in the most perfect way possible.”

A final opportunity to experience a Rorate Mass this Advent will be at St. John the Baptist, Fort Wayne, Saturday, Dec. 18 at 6:30 am. All are welcome.

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When the Diocesan Museum moved to Cathedral Square in Fort Wayne, the idea was to literally bring it out of the basement and increase awareness of the museum. Kathy Imler, the museum director, had not realized what a blessing the new location would be as a tool to reach non-Catholics.

“There’s lots of foot traffic and in a sense, I hadn’t had this in my mind to be such an evangelizing source, because we get lots and lots of people who aren’t Catholic,” Imler stated. Located in the heart of the city between the Botanical Conservatory, Grand Wayne Center and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, people wandering around downtown often come across the museum.

This is particularly true at Christmastime, when many people visit the displays and events going on around the city. With everything looking so festive in December, Imler decided that this year, the museum would add their own Christmas display as well. The idea came from a photograph of the Cathedral at Christmas that former director and founder of the museum, Father Phil Widmann, who passed away this March, had on his desk. Imler remarked, “I think most of my ideas are already in the museum and Fr. Phil is letting me know about them.”

So Imler decided to put together an exhibit of church altars decorated for Christmas. To do this, she had to personally contact each of the 81 parishes in the diocese, requesting photos of their altars at Christmastime. Thirty-five of the parishes responded with photos. Imler took time to collect these and arrange them on display boards in multiple locations throughout the museum. Several of the photos she received were from cell phones, so she had to find a workaround to increase the quality of the photos for printing.

Not only does this bring a bit of Christmas spirit to the museum, but it allows Catholics who have not been able to visit other churches to get a glimpse of the incredible variety of church styles throughout the diocese. The display offers an opportunity for the museum to become more diocesan by highlighting its different churches. Imler is a parishioner at St. Peter in Fort Wayne, and it has been interesting for her to see what other parishes look like and how they decorate for Christmas. She even has a few photos of church nativity scenes, and the variety in those is also astonishing.

“I’ve been very happy that as many came in as have,” she said. Oftentimes, churches go through renovations and staff members are very busy this time of year, “So I’m hoping that maybe every year we can add to the collection.”

Imler is also looking into the future well beyond next year’s Christmas displays. She has what she calls her “five-year plan,” a set of goals to further the museum’s potential. “It may be longer than that, but that’s what I’m calling it because it sounds doable,” she said. The first floor of the museum is basically finished, with two rooms that Father Widmann had planned prior to his passing seeing completion months ago. The second floor, however, needs extensive work and a designated purpose. It is currently housing articles that require sorting and cataloguing, as well as deciding whether the diocese should keep them or pass them on to others who could use them in missionary fields.

A larger part of her renovation goal is to determine whether the former chancery building can become a self-sustaining, green initiative for the diocese. Imler would like to work with an architect to look at possible solar power and increased energy efficiency. “So I’m just at the start of that and it’s kind of an exciting thing for me. I just finished one of the displays on Laudato Si, and so reading a lot about that encouraged me to think along those lines.”

Because of the variety of people who come into the museum, Imler has had to rethink the way that some of the information on the displays was written, to better give non-Catholics a sense of what Catholicism really means: “to include if you weren’t Catholic at all, had no background, what kind of information would you like to have. So that’s kind of fun.”

The Diocesan Museum is open five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and hosts numerous items relating to the history of the Catholic Church, and particularly the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

**Diocesan Museum celebrates the Christmas altar**

**By Jennifer Barton**

Photos of churches throughout the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend decorated for Christmas are currently on display at the Diocesan Museum in Fort Wayne, located next to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

**Several of these display boards are organized around the museum, with over 30 churches featured in the exhibit.**
The Our Lady of Hungary school community is a working class one, located in a struggling socio-economic neighborhood in South Bend. Teacher Kari Wuszke is aware that for the families of her sixth-grade students, regular employment is difficult to maintain; that they work multiple jobs to make ends meet; and that they often rely on public assistance for medical care.

Our Lady of Hungary students and teachers are sometimes, the recipients of the goodwill, charity and generosity of others, which can arrive in the form of donations such as school supplies or funds for specific needs like equipment or gym clothes. This dynamic may be why the student population has infrequently put into action what they learn in the classroom about offering charity and service to others, Wuszke surmised.

“Many of our families receive help in various ways, but our children have not experienced what it means to give to others who are in need,” she said. “They learn all the time about works of mercy in religion class, but book learning is not the same as applicable learning. Until children see where, or to what their donations of clothing or food go, it’s just that, an item of clothing or food. We are trying to instill in our children a sense of them being a part of something more and helping them to understand that what they do to help others is what Jesus taught us to do.”

Beginning this school year, the students are practicing charity on a quarterly basis. For their first project in the fall, they responded to a solicitation from the Christ Child Society of South Bend to provide clothing and stuffed animals.

“We had eighth graders in charge of that particular project, and they collected over 2,100 items and laundered them, loaded them up into a van and a car and drove them, with the teacher and a staff member, over to the Christ Child Society,” said principal Kevin Goralczyk.

From those who have less, more is given

BY JODI MARLIN

The teacher explained to each classroom how the clothing drive was an act of charity and an expression of care for others. When the students delivered the items, they also went behind the scenes to stock shelves and learn how they distribute the items and more about the need filled by the Christ Child Society.

“When they do that, the students understand that ‘I brought this in to help somebody, and this is how it’s going to help – this is how it works.’ So, they get the full circle kind of thing,” said Goralczyk.

The winter service project began Nov. 29. Sixth graders are leading a schoolwide food drive to benefit a nearby St. Vincent de Paul Society food pantry.

The particular food pantry, located at St. Adalbert Parish, was chosen, Goralczyk said, so that the food not only stays in the southside neighborhood but benefits the families and neighborhoods of St. Adalbert and St. Casimir.

“I think what it does for our students is, it gives them a sense that there are students who are less fortunate than they are living in this community. Our kids seem to respond to that. They think they’re doing something important, which they are.” A donor business is also being sought to match the number of food items collected this fall, or their value.

While the clothing items could be gently used and the food donations could consist of just one or two cans, the message that others could be in even greater need than they are resonated with students.

“It really is a full circle kind of thing. It showed them that we can receive, but we can also give,” said Goralczyk.

“The message we want to share is that we’re a highly Latino student community where most of the parents work very, very hard; but no matter what they do or don’t have, they want to help. The people who usually receive are giving back. That’s something we can all learn a lesson from.”

On the economically challenged southwest side of South Bend, Our Lady of Hungary School families rally to help others

An eighth grader carries in part of the large assortment of clothing collected. Principal Kevin Goralczyk said he has seen the teachers successfully create an atmosphere of helping one another this year, even though all the school’s families are of limited means. “We don’t just want to be the community that receives,” he said. “We want to be the community that helps in setting things up and giving of our talents.”

Betsie Pendarvis, a volunteer with the Christ Child Society of South Bend, thanks Our Lady of Hungary students for a large assortment of clothing donations made this fall. The South Bend school is practicing charity toward others this year via several service projects.
Newman Catholic Fellowship house blessed

BY JODI MARLIN

For 11 years, Dr. Kevin and Cara Molyet longed for a place where students of faith at Trine University could feel supported. That dream has become a reality, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades traveled to Angola on Dec. 6, the feast of St. Nicholas, to bless a new, permanent home for the Catholic ministry.

Following a meal with students at the Newman Catholic Fellowship house, Bishop Rhoades commended the couple on their outreach and shared the story of St. Nicholas’ intervention in his own life.

As a seminarian, he had been sent to Rome to study and decided to visit Greece and then take a train trip through the continent with a friend. When the train stopped in Bari, Italy, he felt a spiritual nudging to go and pray at the tomb of St. Nicholas, even though that meant they would have to stay overnight in the town and finish the journey on a different train. He and his friend learned the next day that a terrorist attack had killed 85 people on the train they debarked.

“I often say St. Nicholas saved my life,” he told the students, stating that each year on Dec. 6, he thanks both God and St. Nicholas and prays for the victims of the attack.

In remarks prior to blessing the house and the students, Bishop Rhoades expressed hope that the presence of the Newman house will aid them in not only maintaining and growing in their Catholic faith, but in spreading the Catholic faith “are so great, we can continue to grow in our knowledge of our faith with the help of the Holy Spirit,” and concluded by stating that the best form of evangelization is to live the Christian life through their actions.

The house on Elizabeth Street is two and a half blocks from campus and is of some historic interest, Cara noted.

“It was one of the post-war National Homes, built in Lafayette, Indiana, and put together on site for $3,500. It was kind of an ecclesiastical house, designed to help veterans and their families get on their feet after World War II,” she said. The three bedrooms of the home are rented out to students and two public rooms — one for meetings or prayer and one for games — are accessible by all Newman Catholic Fellowship club members.

The Molyets were able to purchase the home in December from a friend who knew the couple had been praying for a permanent location for the club. Previously, club members and their advisor, Kevin — an associate professor in mechanics at the university — met in whatever room they were given to meet, based on availability. “So, they were transient in that respect,” Cara said. A campus tragedy last year added urgency to the goal of finding a regular meeting place.

Shortly after opening the Newman Catholic Fellowship house in October, Cara and Kevin received confirmation that the large step forward they had taken in the ministry has God’s blessing. The diocesan Youth and Young Adult Ministry gifted them 15 Bibles for students to use, a gift they could not have accepted prior to having the home. “We could never own something before, because we had no place to store it,” Cara explained.

The Molyets and members of the club cleaned up the home’s yard, prepared the bedrooms so that boarders would help offset its cost and renovated the attached garage into a meeting and prayer space. The first boarder moved into the house in May.

Although the ministry is associated with both St. Michael Parish in Waterloo and St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Angola, the Molyets welcome students of all faiths. Around 10-15 participate in events regularly, and another 10 or so are on a mailing list.

“It’s small, but with a permanent location we hope it will grow,” said Cara. “The house is a nice get away from campus, a place where we support their faith. It’s their own house.”

The ministry formed a 501c3 in October and established a board of directors over what had previously been Cara and Kevin’s presence and catechesis with Trine Catholics and other students.

“My husband and I have a very strong passion for the students,” Cara said. “If we can at least help create a positive influence, and have them exposed to that, we’ve done what we think we had to do. We really want them to feel like their friends are here.”

That message appears to be getting through. Even before there was a permanent location, graduating seniors who spent time together at Trine Newman Catholic Fellowship were forming long-term relationships and even returning to campus together from time to time.

Club members come together to eat on Mondays, followed by a Bible study and social time on alternating weeks, according to Cara. The group takes on service projects together, including leaf raking this fall and an Epiphany party in January when items are collected for a local crisis pregnancy center.

What message appears to be getting through?

“Faith is precisely that: a daily journey with Jesus who takes us by the hand, accompanies us, encourages us, and, when we fall, lifts us up,” he said. Never be afraid to reflect and ask questions because “you cannot walk this path of faith blind.”

When the devil sows doubt in one’s heart, he said, always remember that faith “is not primarily about a list of things to believe and rules to follow,” but is the “reality, a beautiful truth that does not depend on us and that leaves us amazed: we are God’s beloved children!”

The wisdom inscribed on the Greek temple of Delphi, “Know thyself,” is still valid today, he said.

“Realize that your worth is in who you are and not what you have. Your worth is not in the brand of the dress or shoes you wear, but because you are unique,” he said.

This wisdom will serve them well, he said, like Odysseus’ dangerous allure of the sirens’ song, the pope said.

“This wisdom will serve them well, what is Odysseus’ dangerous allure of the sirens’ song, the pope said.

“Today’s sirens want to charm you with their seductive and insistent messages that focus on easy gains, the false needs of consumerism, the cult of physical wellness, of entertainment at all costs.”

December 19, 2021
If every parish was a pro-life safe haven

M y track record as a predictor of Supreme Court abortion decisions took a hit seven years ago when I wrote an editorial predicting that Planned Parenthood v. Casey would overturn Roe v. Wade. Thanks to Justice Anthony Kennedy, I was quite obviously wrong.

So I’ll be cautious about predicting the result of the Mississippi abortion case Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health, whose arguments were just heard by the Supreme Court. It looks like change is coming, however. Just what kind of change is something else entirely.

Despite the efforts of pro-lifers who have been resisting the legalization of abortion nationwide for more than 50 years, the forthcoming court decision will not mean the end of abortion, but a new chapter in the struggle.

Anything short of the court’s complete reversal of the Mississippi abortion law barring abortions in virtually all cases after 15 weeks will mean that the battle returns to the states. There will be 50 battlefields, and the abortion divide will continue in our nation for the foreseeable future, trench warfare in virtually every statehouse in virtually every state.

While abortion’s more vocal supporters and opponents will continue to yell at each other as they did outside the Supreme Court while the jurists weighed the merits of the Mississippi case, there is much more that is going on in pro-life circles that is worthy of attention.

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, who recently stepped down as head of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life committee, has been working for three years on a program known as Walking with Moms in Need. In a speech to his brother bishops in November, he described the program as “a parish-based, yet nationwide, initiative to better serve pregnant and postpartum mothers facing difficulties.”

The program’s vision, he said, “is that a pregnant or parenting teen in need can turn to any local Catholic parish and be connected with the life-affirming assistance and accompaniment that she needs.”

It is an ambitious vision, one that will reflect Pope Francis’ idea of accompaniment, walking with those in need of assistance and support. The genius of the program is that it could bring together the pro-life and social justice tradition of the Church, which surely should be united in helping any struggling mother and mother-to-be.

The archbishop cited statistics showing that women seeking abortions are primarily “poor, young and unmarried.” Too often, abortion is not a desired outcome, but one forced on women by circumstances and a lack of options.

In Texas, a pro-life mom named Tere Haring sees this reality every day. She runs a program in the Lone Star state that provides diapers and rental assistance. “Diapers save a lot more babies than ultrasound,” Haring told The Washington Post.

“I always said abortion is the lack of an option,” Haring said. “They feel like they have nowhere to go, that there’s nobody for them. It’s about the help. It’s about being there for them.”

Archbishop Naumann’s vision is that Catholics — you and me in our parishes — will be there for the moms in need. The parish would connect them with resources, with mentors, with helping agencies.

This kind of assistance, the archbishop said, “directly confronts the false, yet popular, narrative that the Catholic Church merely condemns abortion,” but doesn’t help the women.

Whatever the court decides next spring, the need of the poor, the pregnant and the abandoned will remain. Walking with Moms in Need is the kind of grassroots program that could change lives: both those of the moms and of the parishioners who help them.

Greg Erlandson, director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service, can be reached at gerlandson@catholicnews.com.

With the eyes of a child, gaze upon the Nativity

E very Christmas since I can remember, the National Gingerbread Competition has been hosted at the Grove Park Inn resort in my hometown of Asheville, North Carolina.

Growing up, it was an annual family tradition to walk through the old historic building and look at the magnificent creations on display. The majority of each structure was made out of gingerbread, and all the elements must be edible. It is fascinating to gaze at each piece, contemplate how it was created, and wonder at the vision and creativity that was involved in the design and execution.

I was reminded of this competition when I read about the fourth annual “100 Nativity Scenes at the Vatican” taking place this year, as reported on by our friends at Aleteia. Among the 126 crèches on display is a 220-pound Nativity scene made completely out of chocolate, designed by the Il Cioccolato dei Trappisti — Trappist Chocolate company. All of the Nativities must be handcrafted and, like the gingerbread competition, there is a wide variance between “professional” and “amateur” entries.

But while the gingerbread entries come solely from the United States, the Nativity scenes come from around the world. The display expresses the universal wonder of the incarnation — a truth that extends beyond borders, language, age, class or race — and which surely should be united in harmony wings of the Church, for the sake of the Christ we celebrate.

The Savior inherited this role.

Of course, for Micah, the reference to Jesus is a play on words. He is the greatest gift, God’s gift, given in love for us. We are to receive this gift and to share it with others. “As was the case with so many of the prophets of ancient Israel, Micah saw his mission as calling the churches to move from indifference to God, and from sin to piety and to loyalty to the Covenant with God. He lived in a time when piety was in short supply. Greed and exploitation flayed the economy. Religious practices were sparse and often insincere, and poorly presented when they did occur.”

In this weekend’s reading, Micah promises that a savior will come. This savior will lead the people away from sin and to God. To be precise, the savior will come from Bethlehem.

Of course, for Micah, the reference is to a king who comes from Bethlehem. Kings had special roles for ancient Hebrews. The royal role was not primarily political. It was religious. The king’s task was the see that the nation upheld the Covenant, that the people lived as God desired.

The Savior inherited this role.

Christ is born of Mary, the servant of the Lord

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THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MSGR. OWEN F. CAMPION

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Luke 1:39-45

T his week’s readings from the Book of Micah.

Micah is regarded as one of the minor prophets. It is a relatively short book containing only seven chapters. By contrast, the Book of Isaiah has 66 chapters.

Many, if not most, biographical facts about the author of Micah are known, but it is thought that the author was a contemporary of Isaiah, the author of the first section of the Book of Isaiah, and that he came from a small village some 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

As was the case with so many of the prophets of ancient Israel, Micah saw his mission as calling the churches to move from indifference to God, and from sin to piety and to loyalty to the Covenant with God. He lived in a time when piety was in short supply. Greed and exploitation flayed the economy. Religious practices were sparse and often insincere, and poorly presented when they did occur.

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Christ is born of Mary, the servant of the Lord

For its second reading, the Church gives us a lesson from the Book of Hebrews.

Heavy with its Hebrew symbolism, this letter eloquently expresses Mary’s belief in Jesus as Lord, and the Lamb of God. In Hebrews, Jesus appears as the perfect victim and priest. His sacrifice on Calvary was sublime, perfect and utterly unique. It was final because its effects are eternal, providing for humanity’s reconciliation with God. The result will never cease, so no other sacrifices are necessary. All has been accomplished.

St. Luke’s Gospel furnishes the last reading. It is the story of the Visitation. Mary traveled from her own home to a place in the hills of Judah. Traditionally, it has been thought that this place is the site now called Ein Karem. Once a few miles from Jerusalem, it has been absorbed by the sprawl of the city and for all practical purposes is today a part of Jerusalem.

Mary traveled to meet her cousin, Elizabeth, the wife of Zachariah. Elizabeth herself is pregnant. Elizabeth’s unborn child would be John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for Christ.

After Elizabeth was past the childbearing age for a woman, her conception was regarded as miraculous.

Elizabeth knew that Mary was expecting a child, and additionally she realized that Mary’s child would be the Messiah.

Elizabeth’s unborn child understood all that was transpiring and sensed God in the presence of Mary and her own unborn infant. Thus, even before birth, John testified that Jesus, also yet to be born, will be the Messiah.

Reflection

It is the last Sunday of Advent. Christmas preparations are hectic. Everyone is buying gifts.

Less attention may be given the spiritual preparation for Christmas, but the Church calls us to reality. Jesus is everything. He is the greatest gift, God’s gift, given in love for us.

In the writings of Micah, the Church confidently tells us that when we allow Jesus to come to us, peace and happiness will abide with us. In Hebrews, it proclaims the everlasting loving mercy of God.

In the Gospel, the Church reinforces its belief in Jesus as Lord. We should welcome the Lord as Elizabeth welcomed Mary.

READINGS

Monday: Lk 2:10-18 Ps 2:6-11, 5b-6 Lk 1:26-38
Tuesday: Sg 28:14a 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21 Lk 1:39-45
Wednesday: 1 Sm 1:24-28 (Ps 1) 1 Sm 2:1-4, Bsd Lk 1:46-56
Thursday: Mal 3:1-4, 23a-24a Ps 24:5b, 6-8, 10a, 14b Lk 1:57-66
Friday: 2 Sm 7:5-15, 12-14a, 16b Ps 89:2-3, 27, 29 Lk 1:67-79
Saturday: Is 52:7-10 Ps 98:1-6 Heb 1:1-6 Jn 1:1-8
An Advent meditation on the paradox of God’s power

One of the great cries of Advent is for God to rend the heavens and come down. (Is 64:1) For Him to stir His mighty power and come to save us. (Ps 80:2) But what is it that we really seek? Is it armies with thunder and lightning? Is it vindication and peace on our terms? In a way, it is a dangerous cry if we mean it that way, for who among us can say that no wrath should come to us but only to those other people? We do not ask for more money for ourselves, but would rather, its witnesses [to its] vitality. From now on, pray with me, but be sure to understand what you are asking: Stir up your power, Lord, and come to save us! Now, pray with me, but be sure to understand what you are asking: Stir up your power, Lord, and come to save us!

Cardinal Ratzinger then sets forth the challenge of this prayer for us.

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OSV , from page 12

As we enter into the joyful season of Christmas, we would do well to gaze more at our Nativity scenes, wondering at the vision that was involved in our loving Father’s design and execution. We would do well to look at them through the eyes of a child, imagining the lives of those characters so remarkable and yet still so human. And rightly so. The story they tell is of Jesus Christ entering the world so that we might live forever with Him. It is the story of our salvation. What could be better to wonder at than that?

Gretchen R. Crowe is editorial director for periodicals at OSV.

COMMUNITY IN MISSION

MRG. CHARLES POPE

[For our true declaration is “Lord wake us up from our drowsiness in which we are incapa- ble of perceiving you, in which we conceal and imperde the coming of your holy power.” ... Christianity is not a moral system in which we may merely roll up our sleeves and change the world. We see in the movement of the Church a better world how badly that turns out! ... “But [on the other hand] Christ the crucified as not simply spectators ... rather [the Lord] involves us; he desires to be efficacious in and through us ... And so, in this cry we pray to him for ourselves and to allow our own hearts to be touched: Your power is in us, rouse it and help us not to be an obstacle to it, but, rather, its witnesses [to its] vital strength.”

That may well mean suffer- ing, martyrdom, and loss. It may not — and usually does not — mean that God will simply vanquish our foes and remove all our suffering. In this world the saving remedy is the cross; not just for others but for us, too. On Good Friday, Christ looked like a “loser.” Satan and the world danced. But on Sunday, the Lord got up. Friday was first, Saturday lingered, and then came Sunday. As for Christ, so also for us: always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that also the life of Jesus may be manifested in us. (2 Cor 4:10) The victory will come but it comes through the paradoxical power of the cross.

Does this Advent reflection sound too much like Lent for you? Why do you think we are wearing purple during Advent?

Now, pray with me, but be sure to understand what you are asking: Stir up your power, Lord, and come to save us!

Here is the common Psalm for Advent: “Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.’

[The author's name is Charles]
Vatican Christmas stamps feature work of homeless artist

BY JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Adam Piekarski, a homeless man from Łódź, Poland, never imagined that the sketches he would draw in his free time while waiting for the public showers near Bernini’s Colonnade would lead to the opportunity of a lifetime.

In November, the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office announced that its 2021 set of commemorative Christmas stamps would feature images of the Magi and the Holy Family painted by Piekarski.

“Art is my passion even though I never studied it,” Piekarski told Catholic News Service Dec. 1 from a quaint studio just across the street from St. Peter’s Square.

“He went to a technical school in Poland and studied gardening in Łódź,” added Redemptorist Father Leszek Pys, known by many as Father Ruben, a fellow Pole who was among the first to realize Piekarski’s talent.

Piekarski left Poland six years ago and, like many migrants, made his way to Rome seeking a better life.

However, upon his arrival, the harsh reality of finding work, coupled with a fondness for Italian wine, led Piekarski down the dark path of alcoholism that he continued to fight each day.

With Father Ruben serving as translator, Piekarski told CNS that his life began to change after meeting the nun who volunteers helping the poor at the public showers.

Explaining his dilemma to Pallottine Sister Anna, a member of the Holy Family painted by Piekarski.

For the painting of the three Magi, Piekarski based their likeness on two friends who are also homeless; the third, he explained, was an original image meant to represent all homeless men and women.

Father Mazzitelli, who was appointed Nov. 27 as an official in the Office of the Papal Almoner, told CNS that Piekarski’s story was an example of Pope Francis’ call to “nurture tomorrow’s hope by healing today’s pain.”

“What has happened to Adam is a sign for everyone, because each one of us knows someone who has hidden talents and gifts,” Father Mazzitelli said. “The pope says that we must nurture hope means he has given us a mission — to the Church and to each one of us — that we must build up hope in others.”
WHAT’S HAPPENING?

WHAT’S HAPPENING carries announcements about upcoming events in the diocese. View more Catholic events and submit new ones at www.todayscatholic.org/event. For additional listings of that event, please call the advertising sales staff at 260-399-1449 to purchase space.

Advent penance service
AUBURN — An Advent penance service will be Sunday, Dec. 19, at 3 p.m. at Immaculate Conception Church, 500 East 7th St. Four priests will be available.

Christmas Concert / Weihnachtskonzert
FORT WAYNE — The annual Weihnachtskonzert (Christmas Concert) is Sunday, Dec. 19, at 4 p.m. at St. Peter Church, 518 E. DeWald St. Covering a wide range of German music to celebrate this mid-winter holiday, the Weihnachtskonzert features hymns, carols and sacred music along with folk songs, popular favorites and folklore. Contact Karen Zawodni at 260 744-2765 stpeter1872@frontier.com.

Online NFP support group
FORT WAYNE — Are you looking for some support and fellowship in using natural family planning? Join our monthly online support group for NFP users in the diocese. Meet over Zoom on the fourth Wednesday evening of the month from 8-9:30 p.m. The next gathering will take place Wednesday, Dec. 22. Email Caty at cburke@diocesefwsb.org for the Zoom meeting link and pass-code. Sponsored by Marriage and Family Ministry, Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

St. John offers Advent Lucernarium Vespers
FORT WAYNE — Each Friday in Advent, attend evening vespers by candlelight at St. John the Baptist Parish, 4500 Fairfield Ave. Confessions are available from 5:15-5:45 p.m. and Mass is at 5:45 p.m. Vespers begin at 6:30 p.m. and last for approximately one hour. Come back each Saturday morning at 6:30 a.m. for a special Rorate Marian votive Mass.

Life Defenders Workshop by Mike Spencer
GRANGER — St. Pius X and Right to Life Michiana will host pro-life speaker Mike Spencer at St. Pius X, 52553 Fir Rd., Saturday, Jan. 8, from 9 a.m. until noon for a Life Defenders workshop. This workshop equips attendees to be gracious, persuasive and effective ambassadors for life when speaking about the contentious issue of abortion. Seats are limited and advanced registration is required. Learn more and sign up at stpius.net/respectlife. Contact Ashley Logsdon at 574-272-8462 or alogsdon@stpius.net.

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Rosalia Martinez, 96, St. Vincent de Paul
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Michael Connelly, 76, St Pius X
Gerald Rutkowski, 80, St Pius X
Thomas Walczewski, 69, St Pius X

Huntington
Barbara K. Kauffman, 81, SS. Peter and Paul
Thomas L. Shores, 76, SS. Peter and Paul
Janet G. Stoffel, 79, SS. Peter and Paul

Warsaw
Sister Winifred Mary Sullivan, 94, Sisters of Providence, Church of the Immaculate Conception. Sister served at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Fort Wayne.

Deaths elsewhere
Sister Winifred Mary Sullivan, 94, Sisters of Providence, Church of the Immaculate Conception. Sister served at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Fort Wayne.

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Christmas is time for sharing, not commercialism, pope says

BY JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Christmas tree and Nativity crèche should evoke the joy and the peace of God’s love and not the selfish indulgence of consumerism and indifference, Pope Francis said.

Meeting Dec. 10 with delegations from Andalo in Italy’s Trentino-South Tyrol region and from Peru’s Huancavelica region — responsible, respectively, for the Christmas tree and the Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square — the pope said the traditional Christmas symbols bring an atmosphere that is “rich in tenderness, sharing and family closeness.”

“Let us not live a fake, commercial Christmas! Let us allow ourselves to be enveloped by God’s closeness, by the Christmas atmosphere that art, music, songs and traditions bring to our heart,” he said.

The delegations were at the Vatican for the evening ceremony to light the Vatican Christmas tree and unveil the Nativity scene. However, the Vatican announced earlier that due to less-than-favorable weather predictions for the evening, the traditional outdoor ceremony would be held inside the Paul VI hall.

In the evening, despite the rain and cold temperatures, dozens gathered in St. Peter’s Square to witness the lighting of the Christmas tree. In the audience hall, the sounds of festive holiday music in Quechua played as videos of a children’s choir from Huancavelica were shown to commemorate the Andean-inspired crèche.

Archbishop Fernando Vérges Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State, also welcomed the delegations from northern Italy and Peru and said their contribution was a symbol that “Europe and America are united in paying homage to the King of Kings.”

The Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square featured 30 statues depicting Mary, Joseph, the Three Kings, shepherds and various flora and fauna from Huancavelica. The figures were dressed in the traditional bright, multicolored garments of the region’s Indigenous Chopcca people.

Next to the Andean Nativity scene stood a 90-foot-tall Christmas tree. The spruce tree came from a sustainably managed forest in the Dolomite mountains in northern Italy’s Trentino-South Tyrol region. The round wooden ornaments were also from Trentino.

During the meeting with Pope Francis, the two delegations were joined by a group of young men and women from a parish in Padua who created the Nativity scene displayed in St. Peter’s Square.

Expressing his gratitude to the delegations for their gifts, the pope said the traditional garments worn by the figures in the Nativity scene “represent the people of the Andes and symbolize the universal call to salvation.”

“Jesus came to the world through the concreteness of a people to save every man and woman, of all cultures and nationalities. He made Himself small so that we might welcome Him and receive the gift of God’s tenderness,” he said.

He also said the spruce tree was a “sign of Christ” and a reminder of God’s gift of uniting “himself with humankind forever.”

As Christmas festivities draw near, Pope Francis said the crèche remains a symbol of hope that God “never tires of us” and that He chose to dwell among men and women “not as one who stands on high to dominate, but as the one who stoops low, small and poor, to serve.”

“For it to be truly Christmas, let us not forget this,” the pope said. “God comes to be with us and asks us to take care of our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the weakest and the most fragile, those whom the pandemic risks marginalizing even more.”