

Sodality Blessed News

Saint Mary's Catholic Church of Piscataway

February 2024

LENT: A Season for Reflection, Hope & Love

As a child I did not look forward to Lent. It meant fasting, giving up treats and parties, and oh yes, having to go to Stations of the Cross on Fridays while my friends were having fun at the playground. Lent was a season I associated with sacrifice, self-denial and being stuck at home. As I grew older, an imperceptible maturity in my faith occurred; it has slowly dawned on me that rather than making me sorrowful or disheartened, the approaching Lenten season makes me anticipate its arrival with great joy and gladness. After all, it is a time of renewal, rebirth, a chance for a do-over so to speak, where we have 40 days to “return to God with our whole heart.” It is a time when the church asks us to seek the Lord in prayer by reading Sacred Scripture; to serve by giving alms; and to practice self-control through fasting. It is a time when the church invites us to self-examination and to take a hard look at the way we behave towards others. It's a call to true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ's Will more faithfully. Lent is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter. As I have grown in faith, I now look forward to Ash Wednesday- the start of Lent – and as I reflect, I am reminded of an article I wrote almost 10 years ago for our then newsletter and decided to share it.

God's Lesson of Mercy and Love

Yesterday I watched *Jonah: A Veggie Tales Movie* and I couldn't help but ponder the end. Most of us know the story of the disobedient prophet Jonah who rejected God's command to go to the wicked City of Nineveh, an enemy of Israel, and deliver His message. Jonah ran from God, was thrown overboard in a storm and swallowed by a whale. From the belly of the whale, he prayed for God's forgiveness. God forgave him and saved him by causing the whale to spew him out. Jonah then delivered God's message to the Ninevites that their city would be destroyed in 40 days. After hearing God's message, the Ninevites turned from their evil ways; God repented and did not carry out the destruction He had promised. What a glorious story!

But what of Jonah after delivering God's message of impending doom? He watched the Ninevites beg for God's forgiveness; however, he did not believe they deserved God's mercy, especially since they were not God's chosen people. He then waited, hoping for God's wrath to bring about the destruction of the City of Nineveh, and became angry with God when He spared the 120,000 Ninevites.

Too often we are like Jonah. God commanded Jonah to go east to Nineveh, and he runs west. How do we respond to God's call? Do we ignore Him and turn away? Are we narrow-minded like Jonah? Angry with others who have received God's grace and mercy? Have we forgotten how to love the way Jesus taught us? Jesus said: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35.

As we begin our Lenten journey, I pray that we each grow spiritually and are reawakened to God's abiding love and mercy. Blessings and peace as we make this spiritual journey of reflection, meditation, worship, and service.

*Karen Voglezon, Chair
Public Relations and Communication Committee
Sodality of Our Lady of Perpetual Help*



THE PRECIOUS POCKET

An Imaginative Prayer: by Sodalist
Lindsey M. Musgrove

Imagine Jesus walking peacefully on the beach. The sky is clear blue. You can smell the saltwater in the air as the waves crash gently onto the shore. He is adorned in a pure white tunic with a big pocket on the right side.

The Lord gently opens his precious pocket to glimpse upon the multitude of Christian souls waiting there patiently. These are the souls that nobody can snatch away from His hands.

The Good Shepard pats His pocket with pleasure as He keeps these souls protected and close to Him. As the Lord continues to walk, His pocket shakes causing the souls to be formed and molded. The Lord suddenly stops walking. With a smile filled with delight, He reaches into His pocket. When He pulls out His hand, it is filled with precious gems. A treasure more beautiful than the world has ever seen. Pure gems, all different colors, cuts, and clarity. They sparkle and shine in the warm sunlight. Filled with pleasure, the Lord puts them back into His pocket and continues walking until they are all ready to be given to the Father.

How Do You Prepare for Lent?

The answer is probably different for most of us. One secret of Lent is when we allow ourselves to prepare with the help of our Blessed Mother. Then come Easter, we will be happy to say, “Queen of Heaven, rejoice!” Following this five-point Rosary exercise might be a way we can prepare.

1. Pray a decade of the rosary for the **intentions of your prayer life** during Lent. Spend a few moments determining what your intentions will be. Choose something reasonable, like a daily rosary, short prayer aspirations throughout the day, a daily visit to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.
2. Pray a decade of the rosary for the **intentions of your life of penance** during Lent. Spend a few moments determining what you will do ~ perhaps eat less or less-rich food, or perhaps the traditional abstinence from meat or animal products, or spend less time in sleep by setting your alarm to an earlier hour. These things help to remind us of the reality of penance when the body joins the soul’s prayer in longing for God.
3. Pray a decade of the rosary for the **intentions of your works of mercy** during Lent. Spend a few moments thinking of those in need that you personally could help with your presence, like the sick or shut-in. Your visit does not have to be long, but it can be life-giving to those who are bedridden or alone. Or just resolve to listen to others when you are inclined to be impatient, and never omit some alms, real money, for the support of the needy.
4. Pray a decade of the rosary for the **souls of the faithful departed**. Yes, in prayer, penance, and works of mercy most of all, don’t forget those poor souls in purgatory. Mary loves souls who give up the satisfactory value of their good works and prayers for the dead. This Lent, make some new friends in the other world.
5. Pray a fifth decade of the rosary for the grace of **persevering in your resolutions**. Remember that persevering often means starting over again when we break our resolve. This willingness to start over is perhaps the best fruit of our Lenten discipline. Our Lady tells us, as did our earthly mothers, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

Blessings,
Prefect Norma Samuel

#####

On Sunday February 4th, *Minerva Blanco* presented a talk on “**Answering God’s Call.**” Below is a short excerpt.

There are several examples in scripture that serve as models for us to follow, starting with our Blessed Mother Mary. As a young woman, the Angel Gabriel announced that she would be the mother of Christ, the one who would save the world. She responded, “Let it be done, according to your will.” Mary was both holy and devoted to Christ and the mission of God. She is our mother and continues to point us toward her son.

Abraham and Sarah never expected to have children in their old age but with the power of God all things are possible. They cooperated with God and secured the generations to come.

Moses, too, in his old age did not feel qualified to lead the people of Israel into the promised land. God tested and reprimanded Moses, yet he was empowered by God to take the Israelites out of Egypt.

Job lost everything, his family, and all possessions, yet he remained faithful and acclaimed, “naked I came forth from my mother’s womb and naked shall I go back again.” He abandoned all material, earthly things to follow God’s calling.

Elizabeth, in her old age gave birth to the great prophet and friend of Jesus, John the Baptist. These and other key figures in scripture show us that all things are possible for God! We should then ask what God’s will is for us and be ready to answer His call. We can do so in small and ordinary ways every day, showing love, kindness, and mercy to all those we encounter. Amen!

On the weekend of 6-8 October 2023, a few St. Mary’s of Piscataway Parish members had an opportunity to attend a healing retreat at the Malvern Conference and Retreat Center in Malvern, Pennsylvania with Father Dan Leary and joined over 250 women from around the Maryland area.

Due to its popularity, the opportunity to attend the retreat was by invitation only. Local parishes were offered a handful of slots to be filled within a brief period. I am sure it was quite a challenge for Father Plummer to identify and reach out to potential candidates within such an abbreviated time. At the end, Michele Fulk, Christy Hagler, Mrs. Ann Ramsey, Michelle Howard, Debra Piccirillo, Angela Wright, and I were privileged and happy to be able to attend such a beautiful and healing opportunity.

As I imagine most retreats follow the same format, we enjoyed several talks by Father Leary and other guest priests, holy masses, beautiful, loving and touching worship music, Eucharistic Adoration, confessions, a healing service, family-style meals, a walking rosary, and plenty of time to enjoy personal prayer, the statues, gardens, nature, and shrines around the property and meditate. There was also a room dedicated to blessed Carlos Cutis, so I learned a little bit about him and his dedication to the Eucharist.

It was my first Catholic retreat ever, so I did not know what to expect. I asked the question about what to expect and what I received as a response was to have an open mind and take plenty of tissues. My heart was eager to learn what it was all about but truly could not have imagined the personal healing that would come out of it. Father Leary has been doing these retreats for quite a while, so I am sure it is not new for many as he has a way to touch your heart. Father Swink’s testimony opened the ears of my heart and showed me the need to empathize with those who are living with chronic pain.

Some of the questions we were asked to ponder were to identify where and when do we find joy in our life? What gives us joy? What and who steals our joy?

There were so many spiritual nuggets that it would take a long time to share but one take away from Father Swink’s talk was that none of us is the same when we attend a retreat...our substance changes after attending an event like this....we become like an egg, a potato, or coffee when they touch boiling water (like a spiritual and healing retreat).

An egg is soft and fragile, but when it touches the boiling water and stews for a few minutes, it becomes hard and tough. By starting the healing process, we may become strong enough to be able to manage a fall, unlike an uncooked egg. We become STRONGER by allowing our souls to be healed.

Unlike an egg, a potato is hard in nature but when it has time to stew in the boiling water, it becomes soft and mushy, like mashed potatoes. Our hearts become more sensitive, and soften when we understand the power of FORGIVENESS.

Lastly, coffee grounds do not become tasteful and satisfying until they percolate by boiling water and transform into a tasty, savory cup of coffee that can truly be ENJOYED.

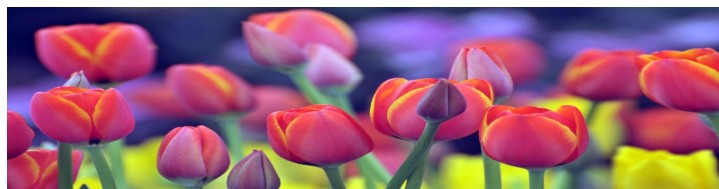
On this earth, we all are walking wounded, and it is in this type of opportunity when we take time for prayer and worship that we experience a joy that comes from knowing that our Almighty God is a good Father and that joy proceeds from His love. It is by sharing with like-minded people that we begin to experience healing and begin enjoying a fruit of the Holy Spirit - JOY. There was so much valuable information but that was one of my biggest take aways.... I am sure others had a different view.

My gratitude goes to Father Plummer for thinking of me and somehow knowing that it would make a significant difference in my current spiritual life. I would be naïve to say that one retreat heals a soul entirely, but it is a good start to walk in that direction. I pray that these opportunities to hear God honoring messengers and healers to share their message are open to others so “that their JOY may be full.”

~~~~~  
“Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things. It consists in accepting, with a smile, whatever Jesus sends us. It consists in accepting and following the will of God.” – St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta.



Attendees of the Malvern Women's Retreat October 2023. Left to right Debra Piccirillo, Maria Cabrera, Michele Fulk, Ann Ramsey, Christy Hagler, and Michelle Howard.



**SODALITY WINTER LUNCHEON**

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Sodality members and guests enjoyed a very lovely afternoon on December 17<sup>th</sup> in the church hall. The committee (Jean Brown, Shirley Lord Cooper, Maria Cabrera and Kathy Giannetti) made the room very festive using red, white and green napkins and centerpieces. Shirley donated religious statues and Jean colorful trees. There was a lucky winner at each table. The food was delicious and prepared by chef Eric Cruz. We had young dancers as our entertainment from Artistic Dance Xpressions, a dance studio owned by Sodalist Lulu Hester-Alexander's daughter, Jennifer Alexander. Prefect Norma Samuel presented the dancers with little gift bags the committee had prepared for the girls. We also enjoyed the singing of our very own Sodalists, Minerva Blanco, and Elizabeth and Amanda Maxwell. It was a lovely day and a wonderful way for Norma to thank "behind the scenes" helpers.

Kathy Giannetti  
Treasurer, and Chair Hospitality Committee



**PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR SICK**

Christian prayer is our way of communicating with God. God wants us to ask for help. He invites and hears our cries for help. Please pray for: Kay Whittington, Karen Macaluso, Doris Washington, Virginia Merritt, Leticia Calata, Denise Sterling, Chase Davis, Minerva's brother, Jose, Elizabeth Giannetti Philpott, and everyone who needs our prayer.

*Lord, we commit all these prayer to You. Please give us strength and courage to get through the joys, challenges, and happenings of each day. Thank You for our life and for all that we have. No matter what happens, we know You have us in the palm of Your hand. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

*Sincere thanks to all our writers. Because of your articles we can continue the Blessed News. My hope is that your contribution and your assistance will inspire others to submit future articles. Special thanks to our editor Kay Whittington for her continued hard work, valuable comments, and constructive feedback.*

*Karen Voglezon*

# St. Mary's Church of Piscataway Lenten Schedule!

Please Mark Your Calendars: ADORATION 12:00 - 6:00 pm (MC)

Ash Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>: 8:15 a.m. (MC), 10:00 a.m., (MC), & 7:00 p.m., (MC)

## Morning Masses During Lent (OLC)

- Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m.
- Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m.
- Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9:00 a.m.
- Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m.
- Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 9:00a.m.
- Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 9:00 a.m.

## Stations of the Cross (OLC)/Lenten Meals (PH)

- Friday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m.

## Stations of the Cross/Mass & Holy Face Novena (OLC)

- Friday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 7:00 p.m.

## Stations of the Cross (OLC)/Lenten Meals (PH)

- Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 7:00 p.m.
- Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m. (MC)
- Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup> 7:00 p.m.

## Stations of the Cross/Mass & Holy Face Novena (OLC)

- Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 7:00 p.m.

## Outdoor Stations of the Cross

- Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 12 noon

## Lenten Schedule for Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession):

Saturdays – February 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>; March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. (Main Church)

Tuesdays thru Fridays – before and after 8:15 a.m. Mass (OLC)

## Other Lenten Activities:

**48 Hour Eucharistic Exposition:** 9:00 a.m. Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup> to 8:45 a.m. Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, (OLC)

Lenten Food Drive (All through Lent)

Lenten Vocation Tree (All through Lent)

**Mysteries of the Rosary Study Group:** Thursday Evenings (February 15, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>), at 6:45 p.m. (Parish Hall)

**Book Club:** Wednesday Evenings at 7:00 p.m. Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, & April 10<sup>th</sup> (PCR)



HOLY WEEK



**Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord: Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 8, 10, & 12 noon, (MC)**

**Holy Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 8:15 a.m., (OLC)**

**Holy Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 8:15 a.m., (OLC)**

**Holy Wednesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 8:15 a.m., (OLC) & School Mass 9:30 a.m., (MC)**

**Holy Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m. Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, (MC)**

**Good Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 3:00 p.m. Good Friday of the Lord's Passion, (MC)**

**Holy Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 p.m., Easter Vigil, (MC)**

**Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord: Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 8, 10, & 12 noon, (MC)**