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Winter 2022-23

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“We must bring Christ into all things and all places, renew and revivify all things in Christ, gain all for Christ, attract all for Christ. Lord Jesus, enkindle our hearts with the fire of this zeal!” So wrote the Renovator of the Marian Congregation, Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz (1871-1927). In this issue we shine a light on Bl. George’s legacy: the vast global reach and good works of the Marian Fathers and our diverse Marian Helper Family.

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AMH DIRECTOR/PUBLISHER:

Very Rev. Chris Alar, MIC – “Father Joseph, MIC”

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: Dr. Joe McAleer

DESIGNER: Andrew Leeco

WRITER, ASSISTANT EDITOR: Chris Sparks

AMH GENERAL PROMOTER:

Br. Andrew R. Maczynski, MIC

MISSION STATEMENT

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WHO WE ARE



Marian Helpers Center

Stockbridge, Massachusetts
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the Association of
Marian Helpers.
1-800-462-7426

National Shrine of The Divine Mercy

(413) 298-3931
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Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception

The Marian Fathers are a Congregation of nearly 500 priests and brothers in 20 countries around the world.

We support the Holy Father and embrace the official teachings of the Catholic Church in our special calling to:

- Spread devotion to Mary as the Immaculate Conception.
- Offer our lives for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, especially the victims of war and disease.
- Operate publishing apostolates and assist where the need is greatest in parishes, shrines, and missions.
- Promote the Divine Mercy message and devotion.
- Organize people of good will to work with and through us to bring Christ everywhere.

Association of Marian Helpers — Join us!

Established in 1944, the Association of Marian Helpers is a spiritual benefit society that prayerfully and financially supports the priests and brothers of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

Your enrollment means that, by a decree of the Holy See, you will now share in these graces:

- A daily Mass offered for all Marian Helpers.
- A share in the prayers, good works, and merits of the Marian priests and brothers around the world.
- A special Mass offered on feast days of our Savior and His Blessed Mother.
- A monthly Mass on each First Friday and each First Saturday.
- A Mass offered for deceased members on All Souls' Day.
- The perpetual Novena to the Divine Mercy.



Sign-up is easy: visit MICPrayers.org



You Tube



[Visit Marian.org/social](http://Marian.org/social)

OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT GOD'S MISSION THROUGH US

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- **Support a particular ministry:** Marian.org/give
- **Create a memorial or tribute:** MemorialsOnEdenHill.org
- **Arrange a special gift** of stock, a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA, a grant from your donor-advised fund, a gift through your will or trust, or a charitable gift annuity: Marian.org/PlannedGiving

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*Thank you
for your
support*

THE SUN NEVER SETS

“**T**he sun never sets on the British Empire,” the saying went, an indication of its vast global reach and influence. Well, the same can be said about the Marian Fathers and you, our Marian Helpers. Today, we serve in 18 countries around the world, as you’ll see from the stories in this issue. Our Marian Helper Family hails from even more countries, including Australia. We’re a lot bigger and more diverse than you may think!

My Marian brothers and I serve the Church where the need is greatest. That’s been a critical part of our work for Christ and His Church ever since the time of the Marian Renovator, Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. Of course, that’s meant the Marian Fathers have been on the march across the world ever since, spreading the devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Holy Souls in Purgatory, and the message of Divine Mercy to millions.

Here in the United States, of course, we have our parishes in Illinois and Wisconsin; the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts; and our houses of formation in Steubenville, Ohio, and Washington, D.C.

Overseas, we have parishes and ministries throughout Poland and Eastern Europe, including in Ukraine. We’re present and at work in Rome, the United Kingdom, and in Fatima, Portugal. We have houses and ministries across Africa, in Cameroon and Rwanda (including Kibeho, site of incredible apparitions and miracles in the 1980s). We’re in Brazil and Argentina in Latin America, and in India, Vietnam, and the Philippines in Asia. Truly, God has blessed us richly! Visit Marian.org/Marians/Where-We-Serve to learn more about our presence and service around the world.

We don’t just support our own ministries and apostolates, but also support the Church where she is in need more broadly.

One great example of this is the Marian Fathers’ collaboration with Fr. Richard Shuaibu, a priest from the Diocese of Sokoto, Nigeria. He’s

been a regular visitor to the Marian communities in the United States, sharing with us his extraordinary stories of faith under fire.

Recently, he went into the jungle to negotiate the release of priests and religious from their radical Islamic captors. We feared for his life. And yet, he secured the release of those he’d sought to free.

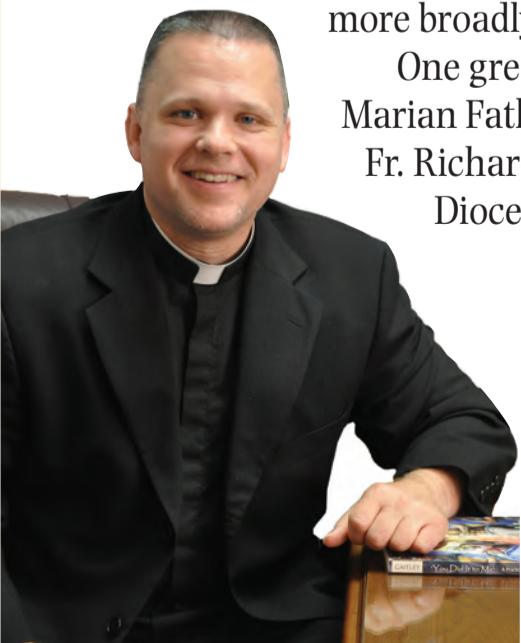
We are fortunate to have his friendship and to welcome him into our communal life from time to time. But we plan to do more than that. Father Richard is also the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). We encourage donations to help our Christian brethren who endure persecution in Nigeria: please help at Marian.org/Nigeria.

Looking ahead, 2023 offers exciting opportunities for catechesis and fellowship, including the World Apostolic Congress on Mercy in Samoa from May 21-25, 2023, and World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, from Aug. 1-6, 2023. I’ll be speaking at both, and hope to see Marian Helpers there!

Thank you for the many Rosaries and Chaplets, for the Masses and swift prayers raised to Heaven. Thank you for the love and support for myself and my Marian brothers, especially during our 350th Jubilee.

Fr. Joseph, MIC

P.S. As we go to press, our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Puerto Rico, Florida, and other areas impacted by Hurricane Ian. We ask Mary Immaculate to intercede on their behalf as the long recovery process continues.



“Father Joseph, MIC,” is the honorary title of the director of the Association of Marian Helpers. The current director is the Very Rev. Chris Alar, MIC, interim Provincial Superior of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy Province in the United States and Argentina.



Making Mercy-full music

By Dr. Joe McAleer

*We want You to know that we're grateful, For the wisdom that You teach,
For the grace of Divine Mercy, That's always within our reach.*

*Gimme, gimme, gimme, Your Cup of Mercy, Lord, please share it with us all,
Gimme, gimme, gimme, Your Cup of Mercy, Lord, forgive us when we fall.*

The message of Divine Mercy meets Christian Rockabilly in Conversion, a part-time studio band founded by Frank Harritt, a Marian Helper in Arvada, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. The band's newest single is called "Cup of Mercy."

"Christian Rockabilly is primarily rock 'n roll but also folk, blues, bluegrass, and even some reggae," Frank says. "This song simply popped into my head, fully written, after visiting my grandkids at Easter — directly from the Holy Spirit!"

'Make God First Again'

Frank is Conversion's rhythm guitarist and principal songwriter. His mother-in-law's dentist, Dr. Jack Moss, is lead vocalist, arranger, and producer with years of professional experience. Rounding out the

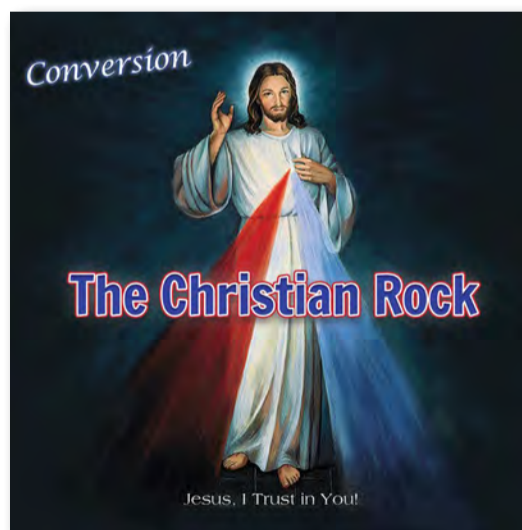
quartet are lead guitarist J.D. Hash and drummer Roman Palomino.

"We are a lay Christian band and are happy to be so,"

Frank explains. "We're not Biblical scholars or Bible experts, just everyday Christians who in our spare time want to do our part to help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world with a special emphasis on His Divine Mercy for all."

The band's motto is "Make God First Again," inspired by Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

Since its founding in 2007, Conversion has been making waves on the music scene. "Mountain Man" was a semi-finalist in the 2021 International Songwriting



Competition, while a Christmas song, “Christmastime in Caroline,” reached #3 in the national holiday music charts in December 2020, just behind Taylor Swift’s “Christmas Tree Farm.”

Frank is most proud of winning the Fans’ Choice Award, Bluegrass category, in the 2020 Independent Music Awards for “An American Easter (The Joy of Mary M).” “Fans voted on the top five songs, and we won for a song honoring Mary Magdalene and her visit to Jesus’ tomb,” he explains.

Spirit-guided

A convert from Presbyterianism, Frank credits his wife of 23 years, Lyna, for his deep faith. She is a lay Dominican leader in their parish, Queen of Vietnamese Martyrs in Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

“Lyna comes from a very rich Catholic heritage in Vietnam,” he notes. “When we first met I started going to Mass with her and just fell in love with the Liturgy and the prayers. Once I realized what it was all about, I wanted to be a part of it. She introduced me to Divine Mercy. We pray the Chaplet together every morning in front of the Image of the Merciful Jesus.”

Conversion is an extension of Frank’s deep faith.

“Every one of our 35 songs has been inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit,” Frank says. “Mercy is the common thread throughout. There’s so much ugliness and violence in the world today. We see God’s intimate and tender mercy as the ultimate answer to today’s problems. He is truly a loving Father, ready and willing to embrace us with His Love.”

Their 2020 single, “You Gotta Have Heart,” is a good example:

You gotta have heart, right from the start

No matter what comes your way.

You gotta have heart, cause we knew, from the start

That God’s mercy will save the day.

Harritt obtained copyright permission from the Marianas to use the Divine Mercy Image as the band’s logo on their album art. “We want to generate curiosity,” he explains. “We hope listeners are intrigued and will reach out to us to learn more.”



Conversion band members (clockwise from front left) Frank Harritt, J.D. Hash, Jack Moss, Roman Palomino, and guest artist Riley Tremmel.

The band’s website also contains information about Divine Mercy and promotes Fr. Chris Alar’s book, Understanding Divine Mercy.

Musical influences

As a teenager growing up in the South, Frank played guitar and banjo. “I am 100-percent self-taught,” he says. He soaked up music as diverse as the Beatles, Bob Marley, and Led Zep-pelin, not to mention Earl Scruggs on banjo and Bill Monroe on bluegrass.

What do his two stepdaughters and 11 grandchildren think of his music?

“They absolutely love it, especially our Christmas music,” he says. “I have dedicated a song to each of them.

“We’re a little bit of everything for everyone,” Frank concludes. “This is our small way of participating in the New Evangelization, to bring people back to the faith and spread the message of Divine Mercy. Music might just be the way to do it.”

MH

Conversion The Band’s music is available online wherever music is streamed.



Is God calling you to be a Spiritual Director?

NEW! School of Spiritual Direction in Connecticut

The Immaculate Conception Center, in partnership with Franciscan University of Steubenville, is offering a two-week course in spiritual direction, January 29 – February 11, 2023.

This is the first part of a 3-year program for Certification in Spiritual Direction. Applications are now being accepted.

Application Deadline: December 1, 2022

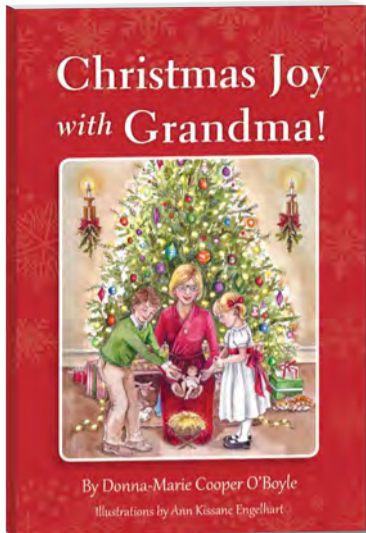
For more information call 860-928-7955 or visit:

immaculateconceptioncenter.org

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Advent is all about preparing for the coming of the Lord. Reading and learning about our Catholic faith is an important part of that preparation. Here are some resources to enrich your walk with the Lord.



CHRISTMAS JOY WITH GRANDMA!

BY DONNA-MARIE COOPER O'BOYLE;
ILLUSTRATED BY ANN KISSANE ENGELHART

NEW!

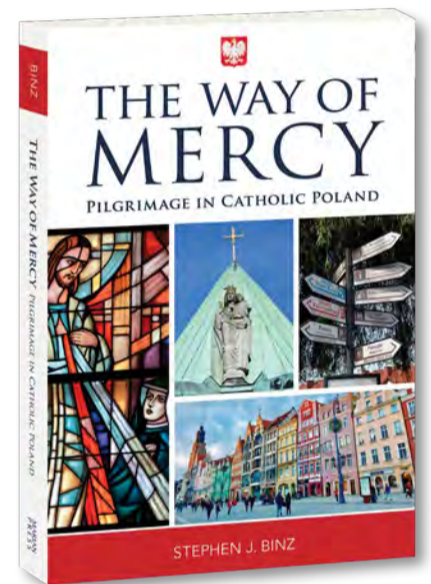
Take an Advent journey with Joseph, Anne-Marie, and Grandmother! Together, you'll discover the story of Christmas and get ready to welcome Jesus into your own heart and home. Beautifully illustrated, this gentle, loving introduction to the true meaning of Christmas by celebrated author Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle will become a beloved book for every family and be revisited each holiday season. \$12.95. **B56-CHSB**

THE WAY OF MERCY: PILGRIMAGE IN CATHOLIC POLAND

BY STEPHEN J. BINZ

This is the story of Catholic Poland over the centuries and the reason for its legacy of saints and churches. This beautifully illustrated pilgrimage guide is meant for those who wish to travel to Poland, those who want to remember their experiences there, and especially those who want to imagine the lovely, tragic, spiritual, and inspiring places of this land. Deep suffering, when united with the Merciful Jesus, produces great sanctity. Read, gaze, reflect, pray, and contemplate the richness of Catholic Poland. \$19.95. **B56-PPLM**

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NEW!

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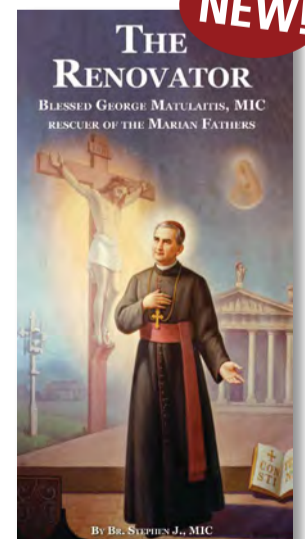
Discover the origin and meaning of the St. Benedict Medal, a powerful instrument of God's mercy at work. If the world, the flesh, or the devil becomes overwhelming in your life, invite in God's grace, given us by Jesus from the Holy Cross, by piously carrying or wearing a blessed St. Benedict Medal. **B56-BMLT**

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THE RENOVATOR: BLESSED GEORGE MATULAITIS, MIC, RESCUER OF THE MARIAN FATHERS (Pamphlet)

Without him, there'd be no Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception; no Stockbridge, Massachusetts, at the epicenter of the promotion of the Divine Mercy message and devotion; no Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, documenting the beatification and canonization miracles for St. Faustina, translating the Diary, and promoting the Divine Mercy around the world. Meet Blessed George Matulaitis, MIC, Renovator of the Marian Fathers. This pamphlet offers you an overview of his life, teaching, and spirituality. **B56-MAIS**

NEW!





A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

In this issue, we will have a chance to meet Fr. Sebasthi, MIC (known by his nickname, Fr. Bastin), one of our first Marian priests from India who is currently studying here in Rome. Our ministry in India is our newest, begun in 2010, and is growing by leaps and bounds.

Can you tell us a little about your background?

I was born and grew up in a small village called Pulickanmoi. I come from a small family, just one brother. I lost my father when I was 8 years old. After high school, I joined the Marians in 2010 in Karumathur, Madurai. I came to know the Marians through a diocesan priest, Fr. PS. Sebastin, who is my vocation promoter. I was ordained in 2019 as one of the first fruits of the Marians' work in India.

During my first two years as a priest, I was appointed as a parochial vicar in a diocesan parish in order to gain pastoral experience. For the past year I have been living at our Generalate House in Rome and studying for my licentiate in the theology of spirituality in the Angelicum University, which is run by the Dominican Fathers.



Fr. Sebasthi, MIC

What are your impressions of Rome?

My time spent in Rome has been very special since I am having completely new experiences. I am getting new insights, learning a new spirituality, and experiencing a new hope, a new vision, a new strength, and a new community that nourishes my vocation as well as my future ministry. I can honestly say that my stay here has been glorious!

You recently went to Poland for the first time.

This was the fulfillment of a longtime dream and desire of mine. I had many different experiences there. I was able to touch and to experience the places and the

monasteries where our Founder, St. Stanislaus Papczynski, lived, and visit and pray at his tomb. Our Shrine dedicated to St. Stanislaus is located in Gora Kalwaria, which is not far from Warsaw. It was one of the best places we visited and gave me unforgettable memories which I will always carry with me. Also, the museum in Marianki near the Founder's tomb helped me to learn more about the history of the Marians.

Lastly, I was able to come to know many of my Marian brothers in Poland face-to-face. Their way of living in our Marian community inspired me and provoked many thoughts and ideas.

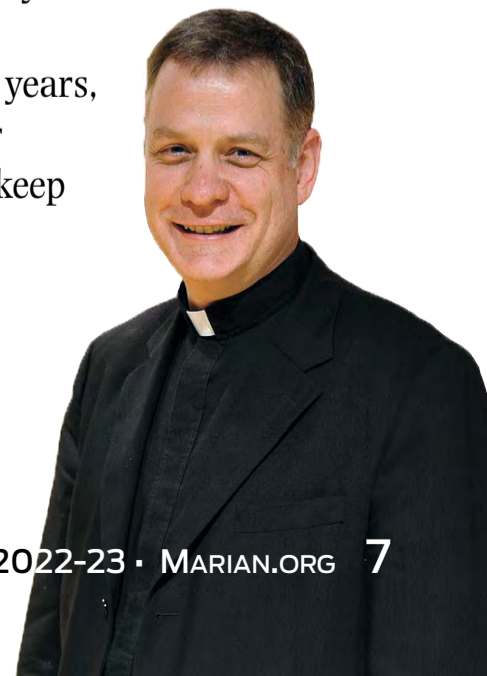
Please tell us about the Marian mission in India.

Our Marian mission is blooming day by day with God's abundant blessings. There is still much to develop, but we already see the bright growth that gives

us hope for the future.

At present, we are four Indian Marian priests who are preparing ourselves to be strengthened and be models for the up-and-coming Marians. So far, we are concentrating on formation and the foundation of the Marian Congregation in India from which we will spread the Marian charism and spirituality in the future.

I am pretty sure that, after 10 years, there will be rapid growth of our Marian mission of India. Please keep us in your prayers!



Father Joe Roesch, MIC, is the vicar general of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. He lives in Rome. Listen to his new podcast, reading and reflecting on St. Stanislaus Papczynski's book "The Mystical Temple of God," on TheDivineMercy.org/podcasts.

WORLD OF MERCY: UNITED STATES



Father Chris Alar, MIC, spoke to 1,000 conference attendees in Our Lady of Victory Basilica on Aug. 27.



Conference attendees Wendy Lim and Elsie Lim are members of Our Lady, Queen of the World Parish in Toronto, Canada. “Divine Mercy is the key to everything,” Wendy said. “We are big fans of Fr. Chris Alar and all the online talks.”

BUFFALO, NEW YORK — The magnificent Our Lady of Victory National Shrine and Basilica was packed with more than one thousand pilgrims on Aug. 27. They gathered for our first Buffalo Divine Mercy Conference in six years, organized with the Disciples of Divine Mercy in the Holy Face of Jesus. Attendees came from across North America and from as far away as Ireland and Guam. Speakers on the theme, “The Need for Divine Mercy,” included Fr. Chris Alar, MIC; Teresa Tomeo; Kelly Wahlquist; and Stephen Ray.



Bishop Michael Fisher of Buffalo presided at the closing Mass.

EDEN HILL — The 12th Annual Mercy for Souls Conference was held at the National Shrine on Sept. 10. Father Dan Cambra, MIC, spoke on the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of the Mother of God. “Whether we’re talking about the Servites or St. Bridget of Sweden, or Medjugorje, Kibeho, Aokpe, and any number of other revelations of Our Lady of Sorrows, we’re basically talking about God’s incredible love for us,” Fr. Dan said. “God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son, that believing in Him we may have eternal life. Because eternal life is really the only life that matters.”



Father Dan Cambra, MIC, spoke at the 12th Annual Mercy for Souls Conference on Sept. 10.



EDEN HILL — Pilgrims came from far and wide to the Polish Day festivities on Sept. 17 at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy. The Rev. Piotr Calik, vicar general for the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts, celebrated Mass and helped lead the traditional 3 p.m. Hour of Great Mercy devotions.

In his homily, Fr. Piotr said, “Please use today and this experience as something that is changing your life. It’s not just a promise, but when you leave today, you’re going to be a better person.” Afterwards, Fr. Piotr accompanied Fr. Mariusz Jarzabek, MIC, in guiding pilgrims through the life-size Stations of the Cross.

Polish Day took place on the anniversary of the death of St. Stanislaus Papczynski (1631-1701), Founder of the Marians.



Polish Day festivities took place on Sept. 17 at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy.



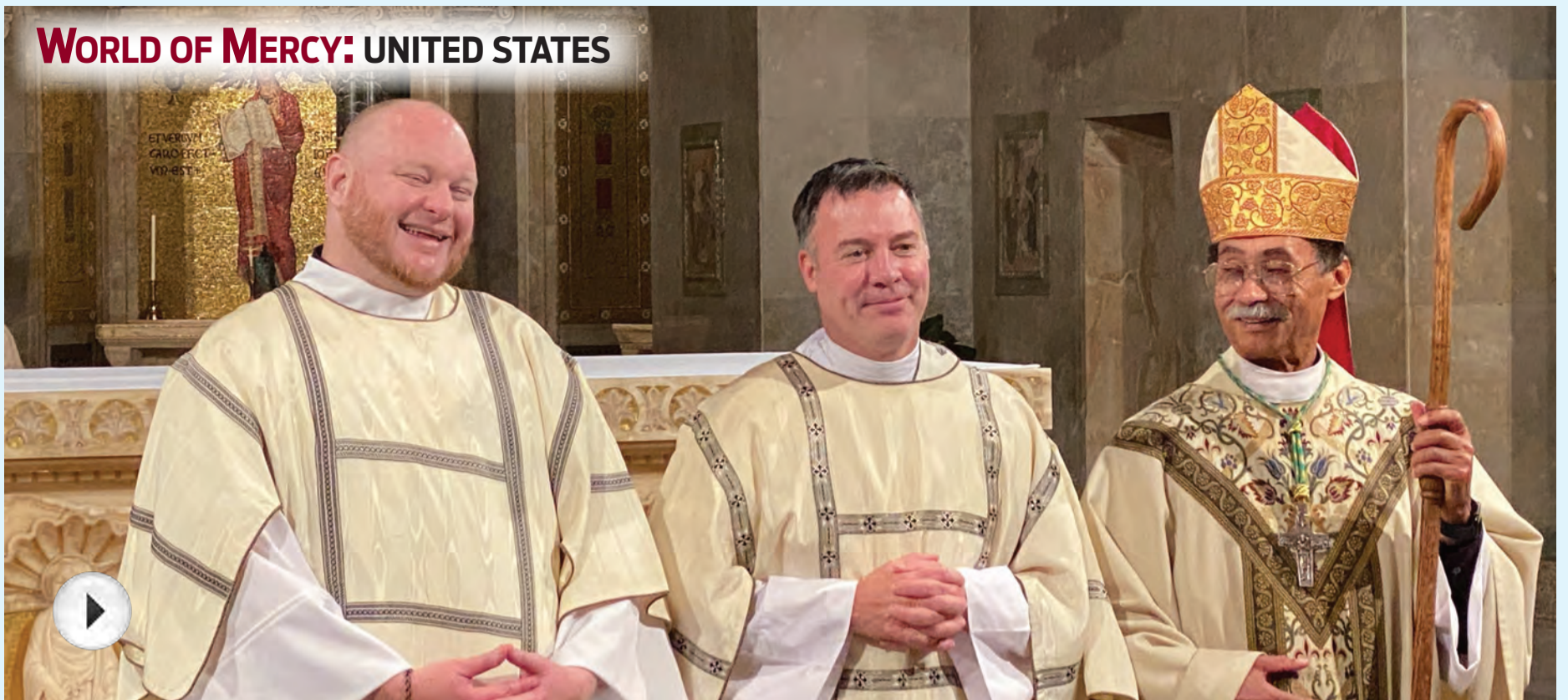
Bishop William Byrne of Springfield celebrated the closing Mass on Oct. 7.

EDEN HILL — From Oct. 1, the Feast of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, through Oct. 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy hosted a Rosary Congress for our home diocese of Springfield, part of the “Year of the Eucharist” observance. For one entire week, volunteers, staff, and the Marian Fathers adored the Eucharistic Lord and prayed the Rosary 24/7 in Our Lady of Mercy Oratory (below) at the Marian Helpers Center.

The Rosary Congress concluded with a Eucharistic procession (above), and Mass with Bishop William Byrne of Springfield. Speaking of a long ago Eucharistic Adoration that confirmed his own vocation to the priesthood, Bishop Byrne said, “The answer to the question of every human heart was on the altar waiting. He was coming at every single Mass, as He continues to do today.”



WORLD OF MERCY: UNITED STATES



Deacon Timothy Childers, MIC, (left) and Deacon Jason Lewis, MIC, were ordained to the transitional diaconate by the Most Rev. Roy Edward Campbell, Jr., on Sept. 3.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — By this time next year, God willing, the Marian Fathers will add two new priests to its ever-growing roster.

On Sept. 3, Deacon Timothy Childers, MIC, and Deacon Jason Lewis, MIC, were ordained to the transitional diaconate by the Most Rev. Roy Edward Campbell, Jr., auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Ordination to the diaconate is the next-to-last step on the journey to the priesthood.

“Do the will of God and charity from your heart,” Bishop Campbell advised the ordinandi. “Serve others

with joy as you would serve the Lord Himself. You must be like those once chosen by the apostles for the ministry of charity — men of good reputation, full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit.”

Deacon Timothy resides at the Marian House of Studies in Steubenville, Ohio, where he is helping form his brothers, and is working in parish ministry. Deacon Jason is continuing his studies in Washington, including Encounter Ministry training and serving as prefect of students at the Marian house of formation.

Please keep both Deacon Timothy and Deacon Jason in prayer!

EDEN HILL — The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy has a new Rector: Fr. Matthew Tomeny, MIC.

A native of Florida, Fr. Matthew was ordained to the priesthood last year, and had been serving at St. Patrick Parish in Yorkville, Illinois, and St. Mary Parish in Plano, Illinois. He is a lieutenant (junior grade) in the U.S. Naval Reserve, and in a few years will be called to active duty as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy.

Father Matthew succeeds Fr. Anthony Gramlich, MIC, who now serves as Vice-Rector of Shrine Liturgy. Father Robert Vennetti, MIC, is the Vice-Rector of Shrine Events.

“We’re excited to welcome Fr. Matthew back to Eden Hill,” says the Very Rev. Chris Alar, MIC, interim Provincial Superior. “His youthful enthusiasm and love of the Eucharist will enhance the pastoral care we offer to pilgrims from all over the world, who visit the National Shrine to experience God’s loving mercy.”

For more information on the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy and plan a visit, call (413) 298-3931 or visit ShrineOfDivineMercy.org.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Mercy House in Gorodok, Ukraine, offers shelter to the frail elderly, an urgent need in the coming winter months.

By Chris Sparks

Make no mistake: You are making a difference in the lives of victims of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“I would like to thank the Marian Helpers who have contributed to the sustenance of our Marians in Ukraine along with their parishioners and all of those affected by the war,” said the Very Rev. Joseph Roesch, MIC, vicar general of the Marian Fathers. “Your contributions have made a tremendous difference, allowing vital medical supplies to get to places that desperately need them. May God reward you for your generosity. Let us continue to pray for the end of this tragic war.”

Father Wojciech “Wojtek” Jasinski, MIC, general treasurer for the Marian Fathers, shared that, so far, through the efforts of the Association of Marian Helpers in Warsaw, Poland, the Congregation has distributed around 50 shipments of goods (medical supplies, food, sleeping bags, and many others) — more than \$1 million worth. “The shipments have been organized with the help of the Marians who work in Ukraine, and they know what’s needed,” Fr. Wojtek explained. “With the items received, they help the local communities, but also hospitals and the seriously wounded.”

Recently, Fr. Wojtek sent \$50,000 to the Mercy House in Gorodok, Ukraine, so the Marian Fathers there could finish additional rooms on the fifth floor to welcome more elderly people who need shelter. This is even more urgent as winter approaches. Father Wojtek added

that, in Poland, the Marians help many Ukrainian refugees who stay in our parishes and religious houses.

“Once again, I want to thank all the Marian Helpers around the world,” Fr. Wojtek said. “I understand that it might be difficult to keep on helping others when we ourselves struggle with various financial and personal difficulties. So, even more I would like to thank all for the support which is amazing. God bless you all.”

The work goes on

Project C.U.R.E., the U.S. partner working with the Marian Fathers, donated over 400 emergency beds and critically-needed medical supplies totaling over \$2 million, noted coordinators Dr. Bryan Thatcher, founder of Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy, and Marie Romagnano, MSN, RN, founder of the Healthcare Professionals for Divine Mercy. “To date, with Project C.U.R.E., we have shipped 92 pallets of emergency medical equipment and supplies on 12 air cargo flights, and seven shipping containers are pending — all made possible by the generosity of Marian Helpers in the U.S.” said Nurse Marie.

“This work is having such a huge impact on so many refugees, the seriously injured, and the sick,” Nurse Marie concluded. “But the need has not abated. Please continue to be there for the Ukrainian people, and be generous!”

Please visit [Marian.org/Ukraine](https://www.Marian.org/Ukraine) to make a donation for Ukraine relief.

MH



Mercy comes home

New chapel will crown a thriving village

By Dr. Joe McAleer

Nearly 11 years ago, a typhoon struck Mindanao, the main southern island of the Philippines.

The devastation along the coastal areas of Cagayan de Oro was catastrophic: 1,800 people were killed and 12,000 families were left homeless. These poorest of the poor were literally left with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Religious congregations in the region sprang into action, including the Marian Fathers in nearby El Salvador City. Within a year, 18 acres of land were purchased in Opol, about 20 miles inland. More than 540

permanent houses were eventually built, and “Mother of Divine Mercy Village” was born.

‘I can think of no better way to mark the 15th anniversary of our mission in the Philippines in 2023 than the new Mother of Mercy Chapel, which will place the Eucharist and the Merciful Jesus permanently at the heart of this community.’

Basic needs

Last year, Fr. Dariusz (Darek) Drzewiecki, MIC, was appointed administrator of Mother of Divine Mercy Village, home today to more than 4,000 people.

“The village is the fruit of the generous and good-hearted people from all over the world, represented by the missionaries working here,”

Fr. Darek says. “In the beginning we focused on construction. Today we focus on the basic needs of the people.”

Those needs range from providing clean drinking water to education, including school supplies and scholarships for young people to attend college. A livelihood program offers job training. During the pandemic, when work was scarce, providing food was a priority.

“These works of mercy opened the people to the spiritual dimension of life,” Fr. Darek notes. “This past year, we baptized 70 adults, some over 70 years old. We were able to reconcile 20 couples who were in irregular marriages, bringing them into the Church. We had over 200 young people in our Confirmation class. And we have many days of recollection for young people, who are very open to learning more about the faith.”

Spiritual revival

With a spiritual revival well under way, the Marianians are now spearheading a new construction project at the heart of the village: the Mother of Mercy Chapel.

“We celebrate Masses in a multipurpose building that was constructed over 10 years ago and is in poor condition, even in danger of collapse,” Fr. Darek explains. “A new chapel will give us safety and comfort.

“But more than that,” he continues, “I hope to attract new churchgoers. The chapel will become the heart of the village with a permanent presence of the Blessed Sacrament in an Adoration Chapel. That alone will transform the atmosphere in the village and offer protection against many evils, including drugs and other forms of addiction.”

Divine Mercy

The devotion to Divine Mercy in the Philippines is strong, with the 3 o’clock Chaplet broadcast on radio and television. Divine Mercy gained a foothold in the country thanks to the Marian Fathers, who printed simple prayer cards and distributed them to American servicemen

during World War II. As they passed through the Philippines, they passed on the cards — and the rest, as they say, is history.

The Marian mission began in 2008, spurred by the beatification of the Founder, St. Stanislaus Papczynski. This was the sign the Marianians needed to accept the invitation from Church officials to establish the Congregation in

the Philippines. Today, five Marian priests serve in parishes, where they promote the message of Divine Mercy and Mary Immaculate, with particular attention to families.

Mercy means learning to trust and restoring hope. “Our goal is to bring back the confidence, cheerfulness, self-esteem, and spirituality of these people who, through no fault of their own, faced a very challenging turning point of their lives,” says Fr. Darek. “Through your support, you can be an instrument sent by God to shepherd these people back to where they are supposed to be, according to the plan of God.”

Anniversary gift

Groundbreaking of the new chapel took place in June. Construction of the 364-seat building will be completed next year, in time for the feast of Our Lady of Mercy on Nov. 16.

“I can think of no better way to mark the 15th anniversary of our mission in the Philippines in 2023 than the consecration of the new Mother of Mercy Chapel,” says Fr. Wojciech Jasinski, MIC, general treasurer of the Marian Congregation. “I hope our Marian Helpers will support his project, which will place the Eucharist and the Merciful Jesus permanently at the heart of this community, inspiring young and old.”

To make a donation to the Mother of Mercy Chapel project, visit Marian.org/MercyChapel.



Father Darek Drzewiecki, MIC, village administrator, poses with the First Holy Communion class. Below, Mother of Divine Mercy Village is home today to more than 4,000 people displaced by natural disaster.



ON A MISSION FOR MUM

By Dr. Joe McAleer

Gerard Young was on a mission. He had traveled more than 17,000 miles from his home in Australia to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and he was carrying a letter for the Very Rev. Chris Alar, MIC.

“My family back home is really thrilled, because I wasn’t even sure if it was possible to come and meet Fr. Chris,” Gerard said. “I actually planned to come anyway. I said, ‘I’ll just go and hope he’s there.’”

Gerard was in luck. On Aug. 30, after an arduous day of travel — by air from California (his first stop in the U.S.) to New York, then a train to Albany, and a rental car for the drive to Stockbridge — Gerard arrived at the Marian Helpers Center at 4 p.m., weary but elated.

And Fr. Chris just happened to be there.

Now that the pandemic has subsided, pilgrims have been returning to Eden Hill in large numbers, seeking grace, inspiration, and serenity at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy. In Gerard’s case, he came to fulfill a last request from his mother, Margaret, who died on July 25, age 83.

Extended Catholic family

Margaret and her husband, Peter, 84, raised nine children in the Hunter Valley, farm country about two hours north of Sydney, Australia. Married for 59 years after

meeting at a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) social, they have 24 grandchildren.

Rather remarkable for this day and age, all of the Young children continue to practice their Catholic faith, as do their children. “We had family Rosary every night, the last act before bedtime,” Gerard recalled. “And of course we would go to church every week, and we had good Catholic schools.



Gerard Young journeyed 17,000 miles from Australia to Eden Hill to see Fr. Chris Alar and deliver a message.

“I just really think it comes down to example more than anything. We saw Mum and Dad being accepting to people and mindful of the poor, open to what happens in life, and taking the good with the bad.”

Recent years took a toll on the couple. For the past two years, Margaret had suffered from stage 4 cancer and was confined to her home. Peter has mobility issues and is in a nursing home.

“We would bring Dad down frequently so they could spend time together,” Gerard said. “On their last visit, they received Holy Communion together. It was nice for that to be their final shared experience.”

A letter from Mum

Margaret had a great devotion to Our Lady, and was aware of the Marian Fathers and the message of Divine Mercy. She was also a fan of Mother Angelica and EWTN.

“A couple of years ago, when the pandemic was in full swing, we were looking for things for Mum to watch at home,” Gerard said. “Mum was always very Marian-focused. She discovered Fr. Chris’ talks on YouTube, and really connected with his messages. He’s so enthusiastic. He’s pretty amped up and a great communicator. He’s giving a lot of solid faith teaching, but in a way people can understand.”

Soon Gerard and his two sisters, who took turns caring for Margaret, gathered around to watch Fr. Chris’ “Explaining the Faith” talks.

“Mum was so impressed and she was always talking about Fr. Chris,” Gerard continued. “I said to her, ‘Well, I get over to America every once in a while. I won’t get there

for a while now, thanks to COVID. But on my next trip, why don’t you write down a few words and I’ll hand-deliver a letter to Fr. Chris for you?’”

Margaret did just that. And she added a set of Rosary beads. “She had been praying the Rosary with those every day, and she wanted Fr. Chris, if he met someone

in need, to pass them on,” Gerard explained. “He could pay it forward and say, ‘These belonged to someone who really believed in the Rosary.’”

“This is one of the most touching stories,” Fr. Chris told Gerard. “It’s an honor and a blessing to have someone who sounds like such a wonderful lady to watch our programs and be tuned into the message of Divine Mercy. God’s Providence worked it out for her last request.

“Margaret’s note says that she learned so much about our faith,” Fr. Chris continued. “I’m honored to be part of that and know that she offered up her sufferings for the salvation of souls. To think that we could be a part of that is just amazing.”

Prayers for Australia

After taking a photo with Gerard, Fr. Chris promised, “I will offer Margaret up in prayer along with you, your dad, the entire family, and, in fact, all of our friends in Australia. I am always happily surprised by how many letters I get from Australia.”

As the sun set on Eden Hill, Gerard left, seemingly walking on air, with a broad smile and the knowledge that his beloved mother would be pleased.

“It was a promise I had to keep,” he said. “I mean, everyone loves their mother, but I just knew I was very lucky.”



Peter and Margaret Young were married for 59 years.



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WORLD OF MERCY: POLAND



Pilgrims at the Divine Mercy Shrine in Płock, where St. Faustina saw Jesus.

TO BE A PILGRIM, IN CATHOLIC POLAND

By Stephen J. Binz

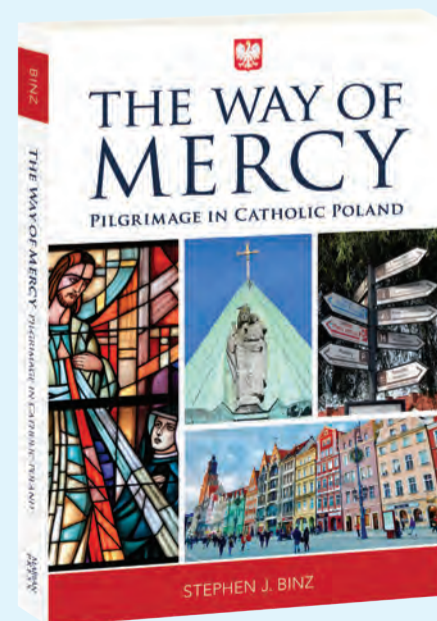
As Divine Mercy is manifested throughout the universal Church, the spotlight continues to shine on the nation of Poland. Today, the people of Poland are hosting millions of evacuees from their war-torn neighbor, Ukraine — caring for them in their own homes rather than depositing them in refugee camps. The people of Poland remember well their own suffering in the 20th century when they were assaulted from Nazi Germany from the west and oppressed by the communism of Russia from the east.

But out of terrible suffering comes remarkable sanctity. During those dark decades arose the witness of great saints like Faustina Kowalska, Maximillian Kolbe,

and Pope John Paul II. The trials of the Polish people throughout the 20th century made Poland the martyr of the nations, or in St. John Paul's words, the “Golgotha of the modern world.” Yet, these sufferings have been transformed by God into a gift of mercy for the world. And it seems to be the special mission of the Polish Church to be a witness of that gift and the bearer of the grace of Divine Mercy for our times.

Travel discoveries

I've been leading pilgrimages for over 30 years, but only in the past decade have I discovered the holy land of Poland. My first trip to Poland was led by a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, the late Eva Mozes



Visit ShopMercy.org/b56 to order *The Way of Mercy: Pilgrimage in Catholic Poland* (Product code B56-PPLM) by Stephen J. Binz.

Kor. She taught me about the rich Jewish tradition of Warsaw and Kraków, the tragedy of the ghettos, and the Nazis' "Final Solution." After being tortured at Auschwitz by the Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, later in life she chose to free herself from bitterness by forgiving all her persecutors.

My next trip to Poland was during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, called by Pope Francis for 2016. During that year I wrote a Bible study entitled *Divine Mercy*, presented 30 parish missions on the theme of God's mercy, and finally led a pilgrimage of eager Catholics to explore the sites in Poland associated with some of the merciful 20th-century saints: Faustina, Kolbe, and John Paul. Now I regularly lead groups on pilgrimage through Poland, each time being enriched by more places, history, and sanctity in this fascinating land.

And this year, as the culmination of my biblical study on mercy and my travels through Poland, I've written a book, *The Way of Mercy: Pilgrimage in Catholic Poland* (Marian Press, 2022). I know that for many reasons people are unable to travel on a physical tour of Poland, but everyone can take an armchair pilgrimage through the cities, churches, and shrines of Poland, and so explore the rich tradition of mercy and sanctity with which this land is blessed.

A nation of saints

Pilgrimage is a unique kind of travel: it requires eyes open to new sights and a heart open to being changed. Whether you are an adventurous traveler (preparing for a physical journey to Poland), or an imaginative traveler (visualizing the places of this land from an armchair), the experience of pilgrimage is transformative. The goal of pilgrimage is to allow the saints, shrines, and prayer to deepen your faith and form you more fully into disciples of Jesus.

Poland is the ideal land for learning the art of pilgrimage. Its history and culture is deeply religious; it is filled with memories of some of the Church's best-known

saints; and famous churches and beautiful shrines cover the landscape. The sacramental imagination distinctive to Catholicism allows us to experience God's invisible, immaterial, and universal presence through the visible, material, and particular places. Through the lives of the saints and events of sacred history, certain places have

come to be viewed as holy sites where the veil between Heaven and earth is particularly translucent. Increasingly, more and more pilgrims from throughout the world are discovering Poland as the ideal place for a transforming encounter with God.

As I've explored Catholic Poland, I've come to realize that the climactic events of the last century were only possible because of the rich Christian tradition of over a thousand years in Poland. The patron saints of Poland, like St. Wojciech, St. Stanisław, and St. Jadwiga, are the sturdy pillars supporting the Church of Poland through the ages. On the shoulders of these faithful giants, the Polish saints of our era stand. They are some of the earliest of that remarkable cloud of witnesses — the martyrs, bishops, confessors, and holy ones — that has sustained the faith of Poland throughout its history.

Likewise, I've discovered other saints, perhaps less well known than the most ancient and the most recent. I realize that there could never have been a Cardinal

Wojtyła without a Cardinal Wyszyński, fortifying the church as it passed through the fire of totalitarian rule. The inspiring insights of St. Faustina in the 20th century flowed from the beautiful compassion for the poor exhibited by St. Albert Chmielowski in the 19th century. And Poland became a free country again at the end of the 20th century, not only because of the witness of Pope John Paul II, but also because of the martyrdom of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko. All of these heroic saints are strands of the golden thread of *Divine Mercy* woven through the fabric of Poland's history.



The Kanonicza Street residence of Karol Wojtyła, priest and professor, in Krakow, 1952-1967.

Poland is the ideal place for a transforming encounter with God.

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PHOTO BY BEN WHITE ON UNSPLASH

AWAY IN A MANGER

By Br. Eliot, MIC

In my childhood, I viewed Christmas as a mere time of expecting presents. As I got older, I have slowly been drawn to view Christmas and the whole Christmas season as a time of encounter.

What does that mean? Well, turn to the year 1223, when a man named Francis of Assisi was in a small Italian town called Greccio. A Franciscan friar named Thomas of Celano records Francis' time in Greccio in a collection of historical documents known as *The Franciscan Sources*.

The first crèche

Fifteen days before Christmas, Francis asked a local townsman named John to help him fulfill his desire.

Francis said, "I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our eyes in some way the inconveniences of His infant needs, how He lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, He lay upon the hay where He had been placed." John went with haste to prepare all the things Francis had told him.

On Dec. 25, many Franciscan friars came to Greccio, along with many others from the local town who prepared with torches to light up the special night. Thomas of Celano records the event in the following way:

The people came and were filled with joy over the new mystery. The woods rang with the voices of the crowd

and the rocks made answer to their jubilation. The brothers sang, paying their debt of praise to the Lord, and the whole night resounded with their rejoicing. The saint of God stood before the manger, uttering sighs, overcome with love, and filled with wonderful happiness. The solemnities of the Mass were celebrated over the manger and the priest experienced a new consolation.

Even more astonishing is that one person present that night saw a vision of a little child lying in the manger, lifeless. The person saw Francis go up to the infant and rouse the child, as if he was waking them from a deep sleep. Thomas of Celano believes that this vision was fitting, inasmuch as “the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of so many; but, by the working of his grace, he was brought to life again through his servant, St. Francis, and stamped upon their fervent memory.”

When the solemn night celebration had come to a close, the people returned to their homes with holy joy.

Even though the special celebration had ended, the Lord continued to work favors for the people in miraculous ways. Thomas of Celano records that the hay that was placed in the manger was kept and given to the beasts of burden and other animals. When these animals throughout the surrounding region ate some of the hay, the animals that were sick were freed from their illnesses.

He also records that “indeed, even women laboring for a long time in a difficult birth were delivered safely when some of this hay was placed upon them; and a large number of persons of both sexes of that place, suffering from various illnesses, obtained the health they sought.”

Gathered in joy

This story has inevitably had a major impact on so many. It is from this story that the tradition of the Christmas crèche began. It is because of this story that thousands of Nativity sets are put up each year for Christmas, as Pope Francis acknowledged: “This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original

event and those sharing in its mystery.”

The story has helped me to encounter Christ, too. Growing up, I was privileged to live near a Franciscan friary that would reenact a live Nativity scene with real animals each year. It is the Nativity scene that evokes a number of mysteries in the life of Christ and makes them tangible in our daily lives.

One crucial aspect of the celebration that took place in 1223 has to do with the Eucharist. Recall that Thomas of Celano said, “The solemnities of the Mass were celebrated over the manger and the priest experienced a new consolation.” In the full story, Thomas of Celano recounts that St. Francis of Assisi preached at the Mass and “spoke charming words concerning the Nativity of the poor King and the little town of Bethlehem. Frequently too, when he wished to call Christ Jesus, he would call Him simply the *Child of Bethlehem*, aglow with overflowing love for Him.”

The Mass celebrated over the manger that night in Greccio showed the bond between God becoming Man and the Eucharist.

Encountering Christ

In imitation of that first Nativity scene, keep the Mass in Christmas! One terrific way to do this is to enroll the names of your loved ones to be remembered in the three Masses at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy this Christmas. If you have never done this before, you might even consider making it an annual Christmas tradition to honor your loved ones.

It is with great joy that I encourage you to “encounter” Christ this Christmas. There is nothing stopping Christ from coming to you in the wondrous way He did in the little town of Greccio nearly 800 years ago.

I also encourage you to be a beacon of light and joy to others this Christmas season. May we, too, follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi and enkindle a love for the Child Jesus in the hearts of those who may have forgotten Him.

I pray that this Christmas is filled with divine “encounters” with the living Christ for both you and your loved ones!

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We invite you to send us your intentions for the Three Christmas Masses on December 25 at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy. Visit Marian.org/b56 to have your intentions remembered.

Long journey home

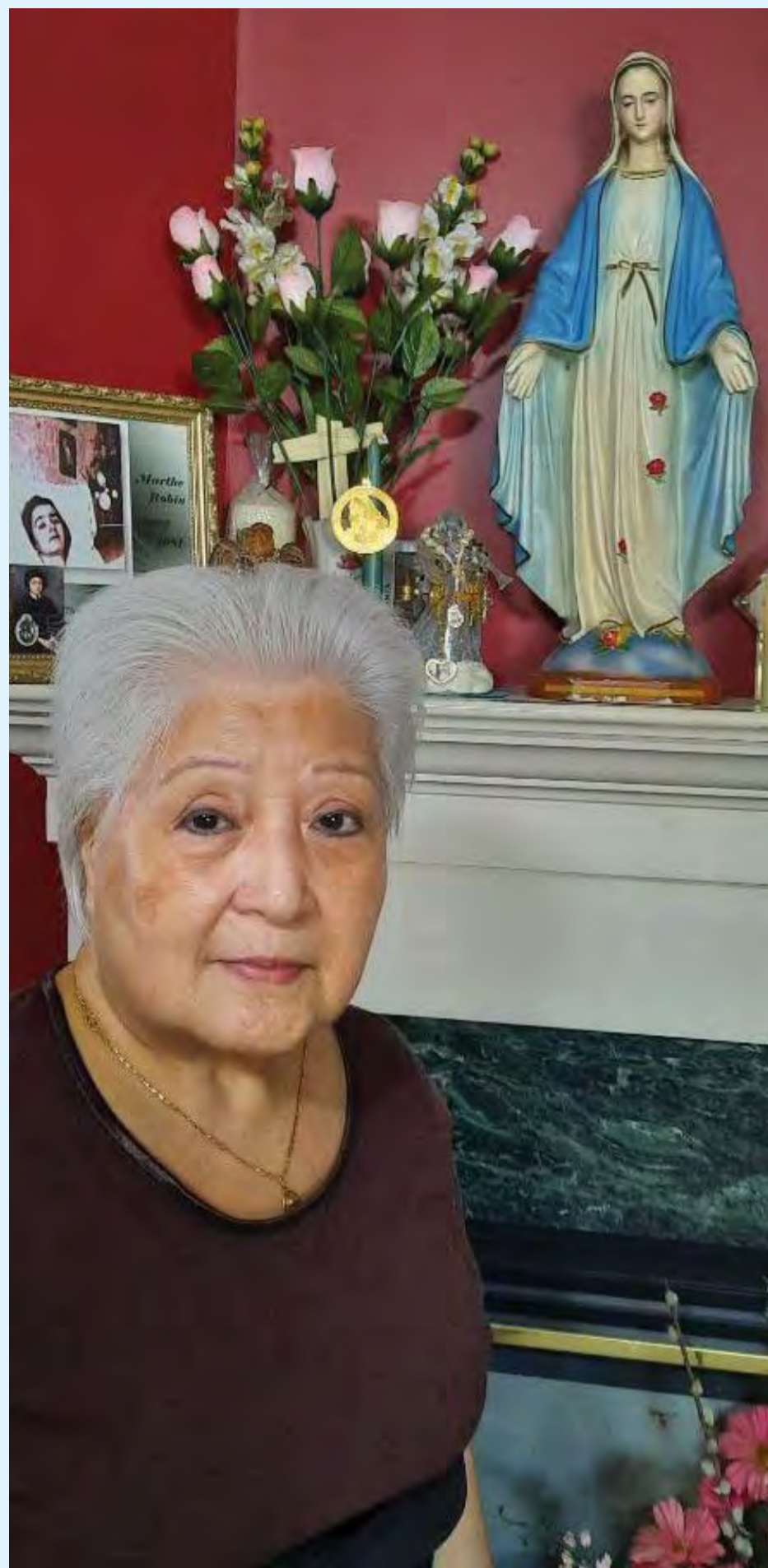
By Marian Friedrichs

Dzung Tran knew how to protect his family. When Dzung had to travel to Japan for military training in 1965, his wife, Dzu Nguyen, and their seven children remained behind in Vietnam. The family lived far from both sets of grandparents, and Dzung needed to leave his loved ones in good hands, so he made a special trip to a Redemptorist monastery. Dzung came home with a two-foot tall statue of Our Lady and entrusted his family to her maternal care.

During Dzung's absence and for several years afterward, the statue presided in peace over a loving, devout, active household — so active, in fact, that at least once, it was the statue itself that was in danger. Dzung and Dzu's daughter, Dziep Nguyen, recalls a time when one of her brothers kicked a ball inside the house and hit the statue. Thankfully, it was not damaged. Later, when the family did face peril, Our Lady was beside them.

Wartime escape

During the Vietnam War, Dzung worked for American intelligence. When the United States decided to pull its troops out of the country in April 1975, Dzung was



Dzu Nguyen lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and, every night, prays the Rosary before the two-foot-tall statue of Our Lady that her husband bought 57 years ago in Vietnam.

among the first to know. By this time, the family had grown: Dzung, Dzu, and their nine children lived in Saigon with Dzu's mother. Dzung sprang into action to safeguard his family, arranging for them to be evacuated from the city before the enemy arrived.

Dziep, 10 years old at the time, remembers the preparations for departure. Her mother, a seamstress, sewed each child a small backpack and filled it with food in case any

of them became separated from her. To transport their belongings, the entire family shared one suitcase. Inside that suitcase, carefully wrapped in clothing, lay the cherished statue.

Dziew remembers sleeping with her siblings, mother, and grandmother in an abandoned bowling alley near the airport while waiting for a flight out of Saigon. In the distance, Dziew could hear explosions. She was not afraid, but her parents were. Dzung worried that if the family did not leave immediately, his eldest son would be conscripted into the army. There was also the fear that, once North Vietnamese forces took over the capital city, Dzung would be sent to a prison camp and never be heard from again.

At last, the children and women boarded a plane and made their way slowly west. They stopped along the way at American military bases in the Philippines — where the family was reunited with Dzung, who had fled Vietnam behind them — Hawaii, and California. Dziew's grandmother had an adopted daughter who had married an American soldier; it was for her home in Arizona that the family's course was set.

"All along," says Dziew, "the statue of Mary was with us."

On the road

When the family moved from California to Arizona, they felt Mary's presence in a powerful way. Dziew's older sister, Dzuyen, was driving one of two vehicles that were transporting the family and their possessions; this car had the statue of Mary in the backseat. Dzuyen, a new driver, strayed out of her lane and onto the side of the highway. Panicked, she brought the car quickly back to the road, which was empty. Almost immediately, however, a large truck drove up rapidly behind the car. If Dzuyen's mishap had occurred just a few moments later, there would have been a terrible collision.

To this day, Dzuyen believes Mary protected her and her loved ones in the car.

After a few years in Arizona, Dzung and Dzu moved their family once more, this time to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Dzung's mother had settled. In 1954, when Vietnam was divided, Dzung's parents had fled North Vietnam for the South, where they would be able to practice their Catholic faith.

Of her paternal grandmother, Dziew laughingly

recalls, "She prayed so much, God probably got tired of it. She couldn't read or write, but she could sure pray." Dziew remembers her father's mother as always holding a Rosary in her hand. Today, her own mother is the same way.

Dzung Tran died in June 2022 after a long journey through Alzheimer's disease. Dziew is convinced that her mother significantly prolonged her father's life by patiently feeding him every day, a process which took at least an hour for each meal. "She almost had to pry his mouth open," Dziew says, and often he had to be reminded to swallow. "While waiting for the food to come in, she would pray. After feeding him, she would pray."



Dziew and her family continue to turn to Mary for protection, no longer from Communist armies, but from spiritual dangers.

Chaplet twice daily

Dzu Nguyen still lives in Lancaster, and every night, she prays the Rosary before the statue her husband bought 57 years ago in Vietnam. She also prays the Divine Mercy Chaplet twice a day, at 3 p.m. — the Hour of Great Mercy — and at 3 a.m.

Dziew and her family continue to turn to Mary for protection, no longer from Communist armies, but from spiritual dangers. The younger generation — Dziew's children, nieces, and nephews — do not consistently practice the faith that has been passed on to them by the relatives who carried Our Lady with them across the world. But Dziew places her hope in God's mercy. Once, while listening to a priest preach about the graces available on the Feast of Divine Mercy, she "pictured God opening up Heaven and pouring down His Mercy on us."

After seeking refuge in many places on earth, Dziew and her mother and siblings pray for the safe arrival of their family at their true home, where they believe Dzung already waits, still watching over his children and his children's children with faithfulness and prayer.

The Marian presence in Vietnam began with the arrival of Fr. Boguslaw Gil, MIC, to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in 2015. Today, there are three Marian priests in Vietnam and eight students in our house of formation. Our priests visit parishes throughout the country to preach and introduce the Marian Congregation. Please remember them in your prayers!

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One of the greatest Marian Helpers

Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe

By Br. Ben, MIC

“Beloved Juan Diego, ‘the talking eagle’! Show us the way that leads to the ‘Dark Virgin’ of Tepeyac, that she may receive us in the depths of her heart, for she is the loving, compassionate Mother who guides us to the true God. Amen.”

— Pope St. John Paul II at the canonization of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, July 31, 2002

On Dec. 9, we celebrate the feast of a simple Indian peasant who gazed upon the beautiful Mother of God on a hilltop in Mexico and followed, without objection, her instructions to bring the Good News to the world.

She was Our Lady of Guadalupe, and he was Juan Diego, “the eagle who speaks” (Cuauhtlatoatzin). In his humility and fidelity, courage and fearlessness, St. Juan Diego was a true Marian Helper.

A Church in turmoil

The story is well-known. The year was 1531. The capital city of Tenochtitlan (now the center of Mexico City) had been recently laid waste by Hernan Cortez and his conquistadors. Cities and temples had been decimated, and



smallpox wiped out half the indigenous population. The Aztec wise men claimed the world was coming to an end.

Meanwhile, the first Bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga, clashed with the new Spanish government over abuses carried out against the natives, including widespread murder and enslavement. In 1530, he excommunicated members of the First Audiencia (Royal Court of New Spain) and fled from Mexico City, writing to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, “If God does not provide a solution by his own hand, this land is about to be completely lost.”

Tepeyac Hill

It was in the midst of this desperate situation that the humble protagonist of our story was quietly traveling

at dawn around Tepeyac Hill, when he heard the most beautiful singing, like a chorus of birds but more beautiful than any song he had ever heard before.

“*Juanito, Juan Diegito,*” a voice called out to him. Wondering what it might be, he climbed the hill and found himself in the presence of a beautiful lady whose clothes were shining like the sun, and standing on precious stones that emanated light. She said, “I am the ever perfect Virgin Mary, who has the honor of being the Mother of the true God.”

Gazing upon him with tenderness, Our Lady asked Juan to go to the Bishop and tell him to build a church. Speaking of her Divine Son, she said, “I will show Him, I will exalt Him upon making Him manifest, I will give Him to all people in all my personal love, Him that is my compassionate gaze, Him that is my help, Him that is my salvation.”

Juan Diego did as she asked. Bishop Zumárraga was a holy and prudent man; he listened to Juan Diego attentively, but dismissed him, asking for a sign to prove that this message was truly from the Blessed Virgin.

Floral miracle

On Dec. 12 (now Our Lady’s feast), Juan Diego wrapped himself in a cactus-fiber *tilma* (cloak) to ward off the cold and set off in search of a priest to attend his uncle, who was gravely ill. As he approached Tepeyac Hill, he remembered his promised appointment with the lady. But he didn’t want to put off finding a priest, and took a different route.

As he hurried along the road, the Virgin descended from the hilltop and greeted him. She tenderly assured him that his uncle was healed, then asked him to climb Tepeyac Hill and collect the flowers at the top, so that he could bring them to the Bishop as the sign he had requested.

Juan did as she asked, and journeyed to the bishop’s residence, carrying the *tilma* full of sweet-smelling flowers. Kneeling before him, he explained what Our Lady had said. Unfolding the *tilma*, the flowers fell onto the floor, revealing on the rough surface of the *tilma* a most beautiful Image of the Blessed Virgin that had appeared miraculously.

All those present fell to their knees in astonishment, and Bishop Zumárraga, overcome with emotion, knelt in tears. The next day, he asked Juan Diego to take him

to the spot where the Virgin wished to have her church built.

Before Our Lady’s visit, the Church had been struggling to evangelize the indigenous peoples of Mexico, exerting great efforts but yielding very meager fruits. That all changed through the *fiat* of one humble native and God’s loving mercy.

Spiritual lessons

With this inspiring story in mind, I would like to highlight three very important spiritual lessons that we can learn from it.

First, humility. The primary obstacle to God’s grace in our lives is pride. Nothing is more detrimental to the fulfillment of God’s plan in our lives. It was Juan Diego’s meekness that made him a potent instrument in the hands of our Lord and Our Lady. If we are humble, God can do great things through us. Humility makes us like malleable clay in the hands of the Divine Potter, allowing Him to mold us into whatever instrument He needs.

Second, surrender. Juan Diego loved his uncle very much. Given the integral fatherly role uncles played in indigenous culture and Juan Diego’s own life, his uncle’s passing would have signaled more than the loss of a close family member. It would have meant the irrevocable loss of a part of his own identity, and so we can understand his anxiety and fear. Yet, as grave as the situation was, Juan Diego was able to surrender all into the hands of Our Blessed Mother with the simplest trust. The reward was an explosion of grace that would heal his uncle, and transform his life and homeland forever.

Finally, God can use you to accomplish great things, whatever your situation or limitations, if you trust in Him. Juan Diego was 57 when he found himself called to a privileged mission from Heaven. By the standards of his time, he was aged and gray, without formal education, desperately poor, and far from famous or influential. Yet God used him mightily to advance His Church in the New World and, over half a millennium, bring about the conversion of millions of souls.

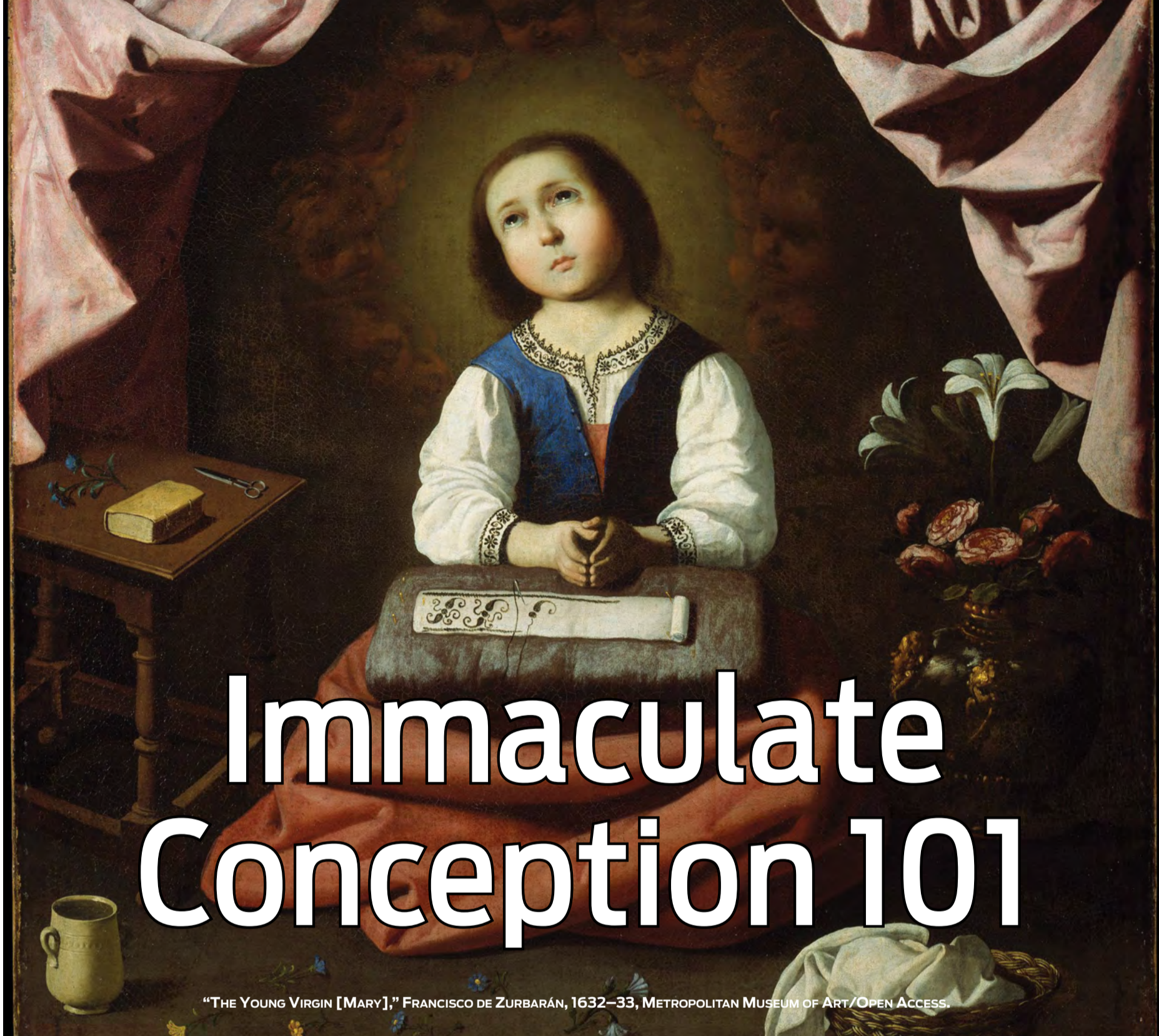
May we, as Marian Helpers, be as receptive to Our Lady’s call and God’s loving mercy.

Saint Juan Diego, pray for us!

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas and the unborn, pray for us!

MH

It was St. Juan Diego’s meekness that made him a potent instrument in the hands of our Lord and Our Lady. If we are humble, God can do great things through us.



Immaculate Conception 101

“THE YOUNG VIRGIN [MARY],” FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN, 1632–33, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART/OPEN ACCESS.

The Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception always celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8 with special joy. But what is the Immaculate Conception? We asked Dr. Robert Stackpole, director of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy and author of the book Mary: Who She Is and Why She Matters, for a refresher.

What is the dogma of the Immaculate Conception?

We can begin with what it's not: It's not the Virgin Birth, as many people think. That refers to the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus on Christmas. Rather, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church (491-492) states:

Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the first moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: “The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from

the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.”

Is there any Biblical support for this dogma?

Yes. In Genesis 3:15, after the fall of Adam and Eve, the Lord says to the serpent who had tempted them, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

This Old Testament passage is a prophecy of the

Gospel, for the “seed” of the woman who will crush the “serpent’s” head (that is, the Devil’s head) can only be Jesus Christ, who is to crush Satan victoriously by His work of redemption. It follows that the “woman” prophesied in this same passage must be the Mother of Jesus (see Jn 2:4 and 19:26, where Jesus calls her “Woman”). In Genesis 3, both Jesus and Mary are said to be in a state of “enmity” against the serpent, which in Hebrew means “complete and radical opposition” to him. Therefore, it is not likely God would have permitted Mary to inherit the condition of “original sin” from Adam and Eve.

Another Bible passage is Luke 1:28, the words of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word *kecharitome* (“full of grace”) is used as a name or title for Mary. As she is the only one addressed in this way in the entire Bible, it must indicate something special or distinctive about her.

Was the Immaculate Conception a belief in the early Church?

Many of the early Fathers of the Church taught that as Jesus is called by St. Paul the New Adam, the Head of redeemed humanity, so the Blessed Virgin Mary must be the New Eve.

As Eve, the Mother of all the living, who was created in a state of grace, ushered in the age of sin by succumbing to the temptation of the fallen angel (the serpent), so Mary, Mother of all the redeemed, was filled with divine grace from the first moment of her existence, and reversed Eve’s sin by her obedience to the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation. She thereby ushered in the dawn of our salvation as mother of the Savior.

So why do Protestants have a problem with this dogma?

Some Protestant Evangelicals object to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception on the grounds that Scripture teaches, in several places, the universal “fallenness”

of humanity (see Ps 14:1-3; 53; Rom 3:23; 5:18).

But the Bible often uses broad language, even hyperbole, to make a point. The passages in Scripture that speak of the universal sinfulness of the human race, therefore, may be said to refer to the mass of mankind in general, without excluding special cases such as the Blessed Virgin Mary (preserved from the wound of original sin) and little children (not yet guilty of actual, personal sin).

‘The Immaculate Conception was the great divine act of grace that lay at the foundation of God’s whole work of salvation through Christ.’

Are the Immaculate Conception and Divine Mercy connected?

Yes! As Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (*Rich in Mercy*, 9): “Mary is the one who experienced mercy in an exceptional way — as no one else.” The late Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, would say, “The mystery of the Immaculate Conception ... is the expression of the first act of the heavenly Father’s mercy in Mary’s regard — an act of absolute gratuity.

This is why we can see in it the Father’s mercy in its pure state. The first act is the Father’s preventive mercy for this very tiny child that is to be born.”

In fact, we can go further and say that the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the great divine act of grace that lay at the foundation of God’s whole work of salvation through Christ. The Father of Mercy made her soul the very masterpiece of His mercy. It was this unique and extraordinary foundation of grace in Mary’s soul that enabled her, years later, to respond to the angel Gabriel’s message with total, trustful surrender: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to Thy word” (Lk 1:38).

May we all be so open to God’s mercy and plan in our lives.

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the United States, pray for us!

To order *Mary: Who She Is and Why She Matters* (Product code B56-MBK), visit ShopMercy.org/b56 or call 1-800-462-7426.

MH



Enroll in our Immaculate Conception Novena

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Presenting the Gospel to ‘little ones’

By Sara Beth Meyer

In spring of 2020, when the whole world seemed cloaked in fear and suspicion, devolving to rancor and division, I felt a deep call to littleness and the joy of the Gospel. Hundreds of miles north of me, my friend, Allison Hsu, was spending the period of global isolation dabbling in watercolors, capturing moments of her beautiful children at play. A pediatrician and devoted mother, her paintings were simultaneously precise and whimsical: a joy to behold.

When Allison shared her lovely rendition of the four evangelist icons (Matthew: man, Mark: lion, Luke: ox, John: eagle), I suggested that we partner to present the Gospels in a fresh way.

Family affair

I slowly read each Gospel chapter and asked the Holy Spirit to help me faithfully render the message. Soon, rhyming couplets emerged, and I delighted in the work, blessed to be learning and deepening my faith through writing. With my youngest seven children quarantined with me, I had a captive audience...and a house full of editors! In a few weeks, I had completed the first draft: 42 stanzas, with chapter citations in the margin. The book divided up nicely into 14 pages of three stanzas each, giving Allison illustration options, so important when sharing the beauty of the Gospels’ theme and variation.

As for a title, while children were clearly intended, I realized in prayer that we were not writing exclusively for kids, or even young families, but for “little ones” to whom the Father is delighted to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom (see Mt 11:25, a common *Alleluia* verse in Mass). Throughout the ages, the great saints have emphasized littleness as key to holiness: gentle humility and complete trust in the providence and benevolence of God.

In the months that followed, quarantine ended, but our

labor of love continued, completing all four Gospels and prayerfully searching for a good partner in publication. Meanwhile, Allison and I agreed that we wanted the *Little Ones* project to be a work of mercy, instructing readers and providing relief through corporal works of mercy with the proceeds.

In July 2021, I felt compelled to submit our work to Marian Press. To partner with the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, who promote devotion to Divine Mercy, engage in works of mercy, and have a solid track record of 75 years of non-profit publishing would be an

answer to prayer. Our collaboration journey began, and now *The Gospel of Matthew for Little Ones* is available in hardcover, in time for Advent-Christmas and useful for the upcoming lectionary cycle, which features Matthew.

Heaven and Kevin

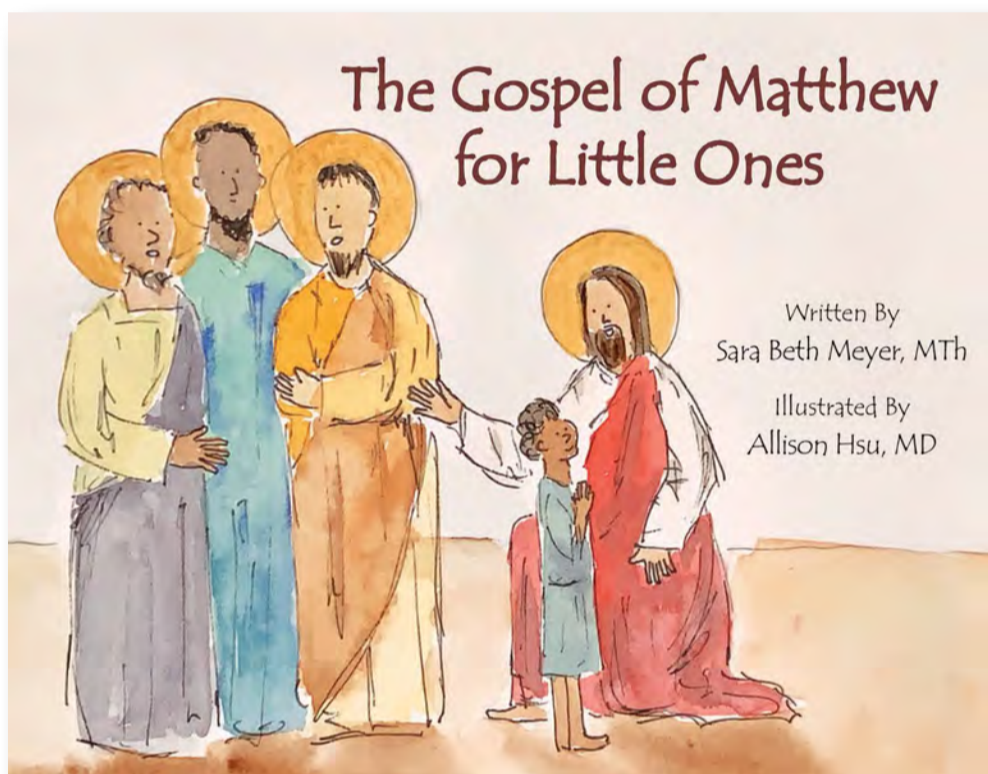
There are many ways to enjoy the book. First is appreciating the stunning illustration style. More than visually appealing, each picture tells an important story within

the Gospel as a whole. When reading *The Gospel of Matthew for Little Ones* to children, you can ask them to listen carefully to connect the illustration to the corresponding stanza. Another activity is to read the first three lines of the quatrain and have children guess the last word of the last rhyme. It is a fun way to build both comprehension and language acquisition.

I did this exercise with my two youngest sons; they remained engaged and mostly guessed correctly — with the surprising exception of once yelling “KEVIN!” when the better choice was “Heaven.” Finally, the book is fully notated with chapter references and has selected Psalms at the very end.

I hope you are moved by the Holy Spirit each time you read it, as I still am.

MH



***The Gospel of Matthew for Little Ones* is available now at [ShopMercy.org/b56](https://shopmercy.org/b56). Product code B56-GMLO.**

LIVING HISTORY

Saints Benedict and Scholastica were twins, both founders of religious communities in the sixth century. Once a year, the siblings visited each other to discuss spiritual matters.

The story goes, at their last meeting, Scholastica sensed her death was close at hand. She begged her brother to stay with her. Benedict resisted, obliged to return to the monastery.

Scholastica appealed to God, and a mighty storm whipped up, preventing Benedict's departure. The siblings talked through the night. Three days later, Benedict saw a dove ascending Heavenward, a sign that his sister had died.

The story resonates with a pair of modern-day siblings, both in religious orders: the late Fr. Walter Pelczynski, MIC, and his sister, Sr. Mary Florence Pelczynski, CSSF.

"We were together the day before he died," Sr. Mary Florence recalls. "I went to see him to celebrate the Immaculate Conception, which was the following day. They said he was anxious to hear that I made it safely home that night. The next day, they called to say he had died."

Marian connections

Father Walter, the founder of the Association of Marian Helpers in 1944, died (rather fittingly) on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, 2000, age 84. His sister, 98, just celebrated her 80th jubilee as a Felician Sister and lives at the order's provincial mother-house in Enfield, Connecticut.

Sister Mary Florence's connections to the Marians run deep. The Pelczynskis grew up in Adams, Massachusetts, next door to the Michalenkos, and attended the same parish, St. Stanislaus Kostka.



Sister Mary Florence Pelczynski, CSSF, has fond memories of her brother, the late Fr. Walter Pelczynski, MIC.



Sister recalls playing in the snow with the future Fr. Seraphim.

"He was mischievous," she recalls with a smile. "He ran into me once and rubbed my face in the snow. Well, I got him back good, and rubbed his face in the snow for a good 10 minutes."

Fast-forward a half-century, and the playmates were now colleagues, with Sr. Mary Florence assisting Fr. Seraphim in the translation of the Diary of St. Faustina from Polish into English.

Good example

Sister Mary Florence was inspired by the Felician Sisters in her home parish to enter the convent in 1936, professing her perpetual vows in 1942. As her brother, eight years her senior, oversaw the purchase of Eden Hill in Stockbridge and established the Marian presence there, Sr. Mary Florence embarked on 60 years of service as a teacher and a pastoral care associate in hospitals. Throughout, she never forgot her brother's advice.

"He used to always say to me, 'Florence, remember: You and I are examples to the family and everyone around us. So don't forget that we must always behave properly.'"

A Polish foundation, the Felicians have a strong devotion to the Divine Mercy, and in the 1940s assisted the Marians by printing the first English-language editions of the Novena, Litany, and Chaplet.

With her 100th birthday not far off, Sr. Mary Florence is grateful for God's mercy in her long life.

"The Lord has a job for me to do, which is why I'm still here," she says with a twinkle in her eye. "He knows what it is, and I guess we're not finished yet."

MH



Monica Bellucci (Mary Magdalene), Maia Morgenstern (Mary), and Hristo Jivkov (John) in a scene from 2004's "The Passion of the Christ." (Courtesy Icon Productions)

LIGHTS! CAMERA! MARY!

By John Mulderig

Since the dawn of cinema 120 years ago, directors have cast actresses as the Virgin Mary in a wide range of films. As the varied titles ascribed to the Blessed Mother in Catholic theology suggest, hers is a personality as multifaceted as it is ultimately mysterious.

Here's a brief survey of some memorable portrayals of Mary on film, all of which can be streamed online.

As with many biblical motifs, the portrayal of the Blessed Mother on film dates back to the earliest years of the medium. A 1903 French silent production, originally

titled "La Vie et la passion de Jésus Christ" and given the simpler English title "The Passion Play," may take the palm as the earliest example.

In what now seems an antiquated form of identification, the actress portraying Mary, under the direction of Lucien Nonguet and Ferdinand Zecca, was credited rather formally as Madame Moreau. (Aptly enough, St. Joseph was played by Monsieur Moreau.) If the movie was old-fashioned in this respect, however, it was quite innovative in another: It may have been the first feature ever colorized.

Silent treatment

The Moreaus (first names Gina and Gabriel) must have been regarded as reasonably competent since they were given the chance to reprise their respective roles in another Pathé release, 1914's "La Passion." Material from that project was, in turn, incorporated into "Behold the Man" (1921).

So Madame Moreau may win on the score of the most frequent depiction of the Blessed Mother by a screen actress as well as the earliest.

Mary also featured in D. W. Griffith's 1916 extravaganza "Intolerance" as well as in such early Biblical epics as 1925's "Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ" and "The King of Kings" (1927). The enduring popularity of Scripture-inspired movies is demonstrated by the fact that both of the latter two films were remade decades later, the former without its subtitle in 1959; the latter, minus its definite article, two years later.

Thereafter, Hollywood's interest in biblical subjects waned. Perhaps that's why director and co-writer Franco Zeffirelli's 1977 masterpiece "Jesus of Nazareth" took the form of a six-hour television miniseries.

Amid a blockbuster cast, Olivia Hussey — the memorable heroine of Zeffirelli's "Romeo and Juliet" (1968) — took on the role of the Blessed Mother. She brought to it a luminous spirituality and vulnerability as well as an aura of humility in the face of mysterious events that contributed signally to the success of what arguably remains the best screen treatment of the Savior's life as a whole ever made.

Mother and Son

In 2004's "The Passion of the Christ," produced, directed, and co-written by Mel Gibson, Romanian actress Maia Morgenstern was cast as Mary. Gibson's script, penned with Benedict Fitzgerald, emphasizes the close relationship between mother and son, typified by a scene in which Morgenstern's character intuits Jesus' presence in an underground cell and kneels to be near him.

Their credible, very human interaction is balanced by Mary's supernatural awareness that her Son's suffering and death are foreordained. In perhaps the harrowing

drama's most striking piece of dialogue, Jesus, having fallen under the weight of the Cross, paraphrases to an emotionally agonized Mary words from the Book of Revelation: "See, Mother, I make all things new."

Two years after Gibson's film, "The Nativity Story" concentrated on the beginning rather than the end of the Redeemer's time on earth. Yet, as written by Mike Rich and helmed by Catherine Hardwicke, the film does nothing to downplay the dangers and perplexities that confronted

Mary — played by Australian-born Keisha Castle-Hughes — before, but especially after, the miraculous conception of her Son, Jesus.

Castle-Hughes adopted an interesting approach in depicting Mary. Her Virgin is not only sensitive but, to start off with at least, reserved and subdued almost to the point of sullenness. Once Joseph is enlightened by his dream, however, the two — initially paired in an arranged marriage at the news of which Mary was none too pleased — begin to bond and her manner becomes noticeably more cheerful, though she remains serious throughout.

Alissa Jung took the title role in 2013's "Mary of Nazareth." From a lighthearted child, Mary becomes a parent united by a mystical bond to her unique offspring. Consequently, when the time comes for His sacrificial suffering

and death, she participates to the full in His afflictions.

More recently, the story of Jesus has again been brought to the small screen via the popular series "The Chosen," available on Amazon Prime. To judge by one of the episodes in which she figures most prominently, titled "The Wedding Gift," Vanessa Benavente's Virgin is emotionally vibrant but also charitable in small practical ways — as well as in such weightier matters as the shortfall of wine at Cana.

No matter the film, one thing is for certain: screenwriters and actresses of the future, like those of the past, will likely find the possibilities of portraying the Virgin Mary both inviting — and daunting.

Formerly a staff member for Catholic News Service, John Mulderig has been reviewing visual media from a Catholic perspective for 15 years. His column is currently syndicated by Catholic Review Media. He will join the new OSV News wire service in January.

MH



The Annunciation from the 1903 French silent film, "La Vie et la Passion de Jésus Christ."



Olivia Hussey in 1977's "Jesus of Nazareth."



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WHO WILL PRAY FOR ME?

When she was just a young child, Glenda Devage's Pop Pop used to repeatedly ask her, "Pray for me," to the point that she remembers her grandmother Ma saying, "Leave the child alone." Still, the pleading worked, and her Pop Pop and Ma can count on Glenda's prayers.

Now that Glenda is a grandmother herself, she finds it very reassuring when one of her grandchildren says, "GG, I promise that I will pray for you."

It's no surprise that Glenda joined the Marian Fathers' Holy Souls Sodality. She says, "When the *For Heaven's Sake* newsletter arrives, it makes me happy to see its logo with the hands held up in prayer. It reminds me that we can help souls get to Heaven.

"I'm constantly adding names to the list of souls who are remembered in the daily Mass the Marian Fathers offer for the souls in Purgatory. I also keep a calendar of dates of loved ones who died, and each month I remind other family members of the anniversary of anyone who died that month. It's a very easy way to make sure they are not forgotten."

While prayer has always been part of Glenda's life, she admits, "Before I discovered St. Faustina and Divine Mercy, I was a half-baked Catholic. I loved the Church, but I didn't know the Church. I started to realize that I hadn't really put my trust in the Lord."

Learning the faith

Her partner in this journey of faith was Arv, who would become her husband in 2005. "We met in 1998," Glenda explains. "Arv was not Catholic, but he started going to church with me. Then he asked me to be his sponsor, and I attended the RCIA classes with him. It was wonderful as an adult to learn the faith like I had never known it before.

"Arv entered the Church on the Easter Vigil in 2000. I'll never forget what he said: 'I found home and I found a mother.' And every year on the Easter Vigil, he would say, 'It's my birthday!' and grin ear to ear."

Arv's actual birthday is October 5. "He got a real kick

out of having the same birthday as St. Faustina!" Glenda says with a chuckle.

They became acquainted with St. Faustina right around the time that Arv became Catholic. They heard about a special celebration for Divine Mercy Sunday at Holy Rosary Church in Baltimore, Maryland, and they attended.

They discovered the pastor, Fr. Ron Pytel, had been cured of heart disease through the intercession of this humble nun, and that the miracle was presented and approved for her cause for canonization! They also learned that the parishioners had held an all-night prayer vigil, pleading for their beloved priest's healing.

Inspired by such a loving community of faith, Glenda and Arv appealed to their newly-appointed pastor to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday at their parish, St. Mark's in Fallston.

Gregorian Masses

When Glenda was working on her estate plans, she naturally thought about who would be praying for the blessed repose of her soul. We discussed ideas for arranging a gift in her will or pre-arranging 30-day Gregorian Masses.

Then she and her son met with her attorney. They agreed that, in her case, her son could be responsible for requesting Masses for her intentions, so it will be arranged outside of her will. Glenda is happy that she can count on her son, just like her Pop Pop counts on her.

If you would like to learn about the Holy Souls Sodality visit PrayForSouls.org. Also feel free to contact me to discuss charitable gift planning or visit Marian.org/PlannedGiving.



Ellen Miller is director for Special Gifts. Contact her at helpers@Marian.org; (413) 298-1380; or Association of Marian Helpers, Stockbridge, MA 01263. Visit Marian.org/PlannedGiving

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Questions? Contact Ellen Miller at EMiller@Marian.org or (413) 298-1380.

GRACES RECEIVED

A job offer the next day

After receiving the Summer 2022 edition of *Marian Helper* in the mail, I was reminded to pray to Venerable Casimir for special graces. My husband was forced to resign his position and was in desperate need of a job for more than a month. I had been praying to multiple saints. After I added Venerable Casimir to pray for my intentions, my husband got an interview — the same day he applied. He received a job offer the next day! Thank you, Marians, for bringing Venerable Casimir to our attention and thank you, Venerable Casimir, for your gracious intercession!

— JE, email

A better job and a proper wage

I prayed to Venerable Casimir that my son would find a better job, which would allow him to use his knowledge and experience. I also prayed he would be paid a proper wage with good benefits. He has found such a job with a very successful business. I thank God and Venerable Casimir for answering my prayers.

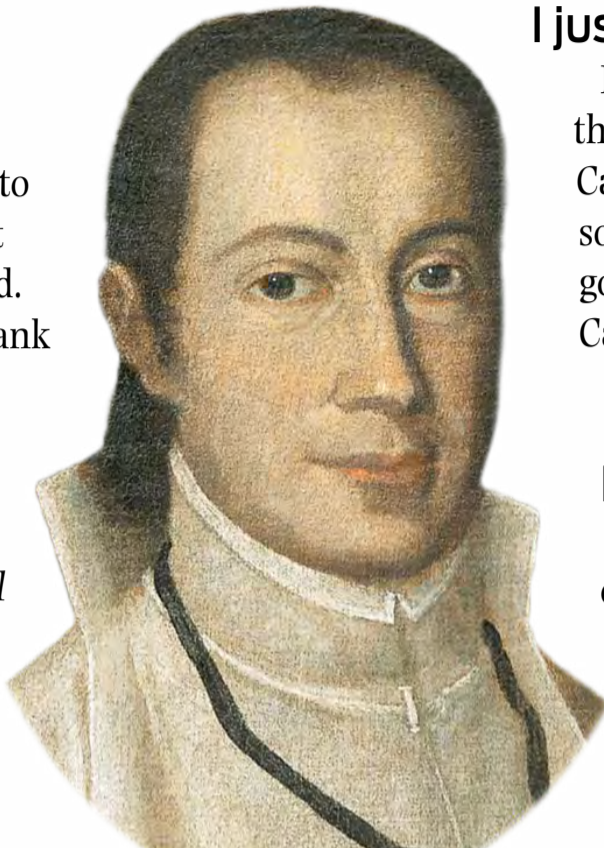
— CD, email

Accepted into a competitive program

My son-in-law felt he needed to change careers and decided to become a first responder. I prayed to Venerable Casimir that he be accepted into a junior college with a good reputation for training and placing EMTs and firefighters. Gaining admission to the program is very competitive. He was accepted into the next class and started in January 2022. I believe it was the intercession of Venerable Casimir that allowed it to happen. Thank

you. I will continue to pray for him to become “Blessed Casimir.”

— FEL, email



Acknowledgments of graces received through the intercession of Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński (1700-1755).

I just got my dream job!

I believe I have received a special grace through the intercession of Venerable Casimir! I had been lost in my career path, so I prayed to Venerable Casimir. I just got my dream job! Thank you, Venerable Casimir!

— LS, email

Now my son has three jobs

I can't remember how I got a copy of *Marian Helper* but it was so timely because my youngest son was jobless at that time. I was really praying very much for him. He really worked hard to get a job. Then I saw this article about graces received. I had never heard of Venerable Casimir before. As soon as my eyes fell on this article, I started praying to him and begged him to help my son get a job. We didn't even have to wait long. My son got a job. Not only that, soon a part-time job

was also being offered to him, then another part-time job. Now his hands are full. And all jobs are in line with his college major: mass communications. Though very busy, he's very happy and fulfilled. Hail to Venerable Casimir!

— MGL, Ramsey, New Jersey

For a Venerable Casimir prayer card (B56-BCWP), call toll free 1-800-462-7426. If you have received graces through his intercession, please write: Br. Andrew Maczynski, MIC, Vice Postulator of the Marian Causes of Canonization, 2 Prospect Hill Road, Stockbridge, MA, 01263. Email: graces@Marian.org

Prayer for a special grace through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński

O God, Merciful Father, in the heart of Your Servant Casimir, You aroused a great zeal for accomplishing corporal and spiritual deeds of mercy; deign to grant to me (to us) through his intercession the grace ... for which I (we) implore You. Amen.

Our Father ... Hail Mary ... Glory Be to the Father ...

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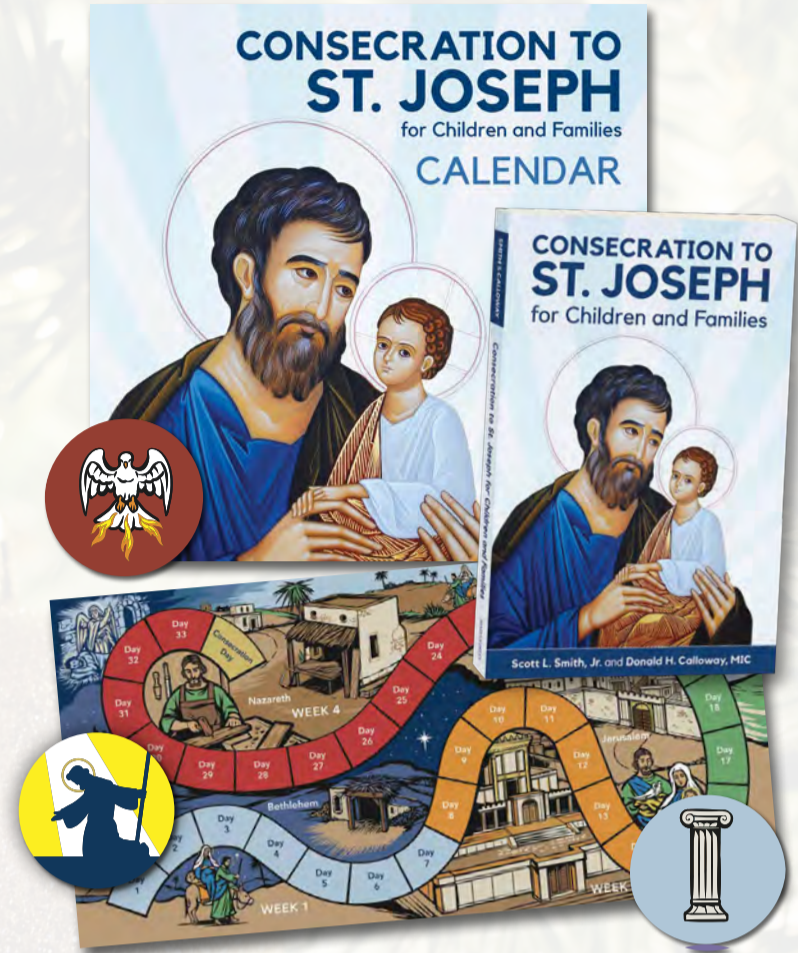


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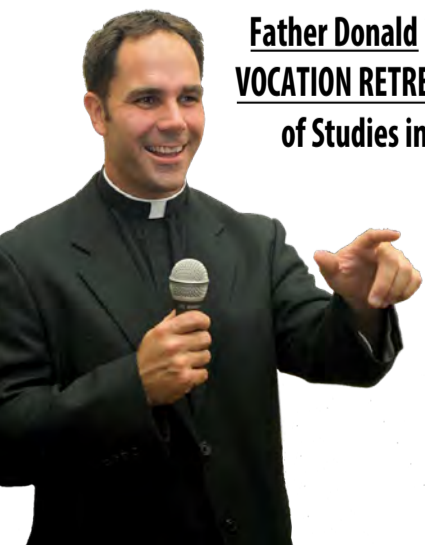
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