

FMA FOCUS

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Franciscan Mission Associates
Mt. Vernon, N.Y. 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America



VIRTUE: HUMILITY

Christian humility is not groveling or debasing oneself. It is the ability to recognize that all things depend on God and we are not gods but creatures. And all our gifts are based in His love and are from Him. In today's world it is easy to be superficial and artificial. Practicing the virtue of humility will save you from that. Thinking not less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less. Each of us has unique gifts for the spirit that are given by God. For us to recognize them and thank Him and use them to serve Him is true humility. Look at your own gifts – and give this month without expecting something in return. Welcome God's blessings and share them. Your reward will come. ■

Preparing for Lent with a spiritual renewal – healthy mind, body and soul



Lent which begins on February 22 this year is a special time for Catholics. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, the Lenten observance is a time, a period, even an invitation from God to enter into a renewal and spiritual growth. In many ways Lent is like a vacation. Time to remind ourselves that the Christian life is more than an endless round of the ordinary workday and world.

We, North Americans, have become enamored of physical fitness and dieting. Always searching for the quick and easy way to reach a goal. The perfect diet as a plan to beauty and good health. And whatever the plan, we have all the

resources. All around us are health apps, websites and clubs. We have special diets and even special sections of the food markets where diet and low calorie and low carb, or gluten-free food is sold.

There is the plan for the body – the secular world. But where is the spiritual physical fitness? The strengthening of the mind and soul. For Catholic Christians we embark on just such a renewal plan for the mind and soul – and also body – beginning with the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads, an age-old symbol in ashes on Ash Wednesday. Throughout the days of Lent we work to strengthen the mind and spirit, remove the fat of spiritual sloth and the weakness that comes from leaving prayer last in our priorities.

A great tool we have is spiritual reading that can become the remedy for spiritual sloth. Check your app store. Nestled in there are more than just games and productivity tools. There are wonderful resources for spiritual reading and growth. Looking for a community too, check your parish bulletin, that is also online. Lenten reading or study groups are always offered. Group discussions on each person's Lenten journey can be fulfilling and joyful. Look also to the lives of the saints. Perhaps a good spiritual book that fills our soul is there. Hundreds are published every year; these would be the

spiritual exercises which would strengthen spirit and soul. It is a wonderful reminder that saints are people and that we can aspire to be saints, even with our everyday flaws. This leads us to Confession. During Lent, when opportunities abound, avail yourself of the grace-giving sacrament of confession. The soul renewal, the penance, all that creates a safe and wonderful place to strengthen your spirit is available to you in this sacrament. Churches make an extra effort to offer this sacrament during Lent, some with catchy slogans like “the Lenten light is on.” Meet God in this sacrament. Ask Him to be with you on this annual journey and grow in faith. ■

Remembrance

You can continue to carry on your own good work for the missions and the people they serve by remembering them in your will. To do so, simply make a bequest of whatever you wish to: FRANCISCAN MISSION ASSOCIATES, Mount Vernon, NY 10551. If you wish additional information about how to do this, please feel free to contact:

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MOTHER MARY – THE NURTURING SAINT IN THE KITCHEN

So many of us after years of battling COVID have taken to working from home. It was a seismic shift for the workforce but not for all. Many men and women have been home working for years, both jobs and caring for their families. Whomever is home and in whatever capacity they can share in the spirit Mary showed to the Holy Family and the world from her place at the hearth and the well. Of course, the Holy Family's home in Nazareth had far fewer conveniences than our modern homes have. So, Mary was truly a worker! Like others in this country village, Mary had to go to the village well to draw water for everything from drinking to bathing. She prepared foods daily, often preparing her own grains, baking the family's bread, hanging up the wineskins, sweeping the floor. Her day never ended!!

And all the while tending to the human relationships – reaching out to those in need, maintaining a marriage and son. And always, we know, Mary carried in her heart the extraordinary grace of being open to the Presence of God. She, no matter the task, devoted herself to God and to His directions. She raised her son and was by his side when his ministry began at the wedding of Cana. Instructing the servants to listen to Jesus, "His mother said to the servers, 'Do whatever he tells

you,'" (Jn, 2:5). The heart of Mary was truly the "heart" of their home in Nazareth.

Prayer, observances of her religious faith, and dealing constantly with the need to open human experience in this world to the Presence of God – these were Mary's special gifts, the treasure she brought to creating a healthy and holy home.

Both men and women, who now find themselves sharing in the household tasks, can share in this special devotion to Mary, especially when that work may deal with guiding the young children or grandchildren. Count on the Blessed Mother to teach us how to find and share the Presences of God – the most important education any child could ever have. A simple Hail Mary before each big job would do it. Her grace and support brings us closer to our Lord with each trip to soccer practice, to the grocery store or Mass. We carry Mary's legacy with us each day and we pray to live up to the spiritual guidance she offers us with each breath. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.* ■



VOCATIONS

Please pray for the young people at home and in the missions who are ready and eager to dedicate their lives to God and the spiritual welfare of His people.

Often all they really need is the special courage to hear God's call and to answer Him. Please join us in daily prayer for God's grace in providing devoted brothers, sisters, priests, and religious for Christ's work in today's world.

For further information please write Fr. Robert, O.F.M. at
Franciscan Mission Associates, P.O. Box 598, Dept. 3233, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

St. Cyril and Methodius – Apostles to the Slavs



With Lent beginning in February, we have many feast days that are often obscured by the Lenten Celebration. But we can find them anyway. Thanks to our great St. John Paul II, we have been invited to learn more about the eastern churches and the saints we might not otherwise know about. His encyclical on Sts. Cyril (Monk) and Methodius (Bishop), Greek brothers who evangelized the Slavic peoples in the second half of the 9th century, is a perfect example.

In his 1985 encyclical entitled “Slavorum Apostoli” St. John Paul II wrote of the 9th century brothers, describing their missionary work in what is now Eastern Europe.

What St. John Paul II stressed was the importance of their work and their methods in helping people of different cultures to live, work and pray together. They were great evangelizers or missionaries. The two brothers were born to a noble family in the historic Greek City of Thessaloniki. The younger brother was baptized Constantine, recognizing his scholarly vocation early. Ordained, he became a leading scholar at the imperial university in Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey). Many years later in Rome, Constantine became a monk and took the name of Cyril shortly before his death, February 14, 869 AD.

Cyril is known for inventing an

alphabet still used in some eastern liturgies.

His followers translated the Gospels, Paul’s letters and liturgical books into Slavonic, spreading the Word of the Lord to the people in these lands. Their spreading of the Word was not accepted by all, especially by the German clergy. Because the bishop refused to consecrate Slavic bishops and priests, Cyril was forced to appeal to Rome. His persistence paid off and he and his brother received approval from Pope Adrian II for their liturgy. Shortly after that approval was granted, Cyril died after a long illness. Methodius kept his brother’s missionary work alive for 16 more years. He continued to translate documents and proclaim the liturgy in the native tongue, winning many to the faith ancestors of Eastern Christians who have kept their faith alive through centuries of persecution, wars and trials. Pick up a good biography of the brothers this Lent or consult a book of the lives of the saints. You will recognize their struggles and troubles – jealousy by other regions of Christians who resented their success in conversion, largely because they made use of native languages. We are reminded to recognize and learn from their work and apply it to the call every baptized Christian must answer, bringing the Gospel to our own world wherever we may be. ■

Accepting God's Word from His priest

The days of old when the priest was the only educated person in the parish are gone. Some parishioners are often the equal in education to the priest; many even surpass him in wisdom and experience. Our years of schooling however do not always match the specific educational experience a priest or brother undergoes to be able to embody the Word of Christ. In a meeting with seminarians Pope Francis told them to care for their own spirituality and also always be open to the Holy Spirit. These men devote their entirety to the Lord and to His directives. They are always learning, always becoming closer to God for the purpose of bringing the faithful closer also. In April of 2022, the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy approved new norms for the formation of seminarians. This is the sixth edition of the Program for Priestly Formation. The new program required seminaries to work with priests in different ways at the beginning and end of their studies. The new edition states it is the product of "reflecting on the lived experience of seminaries and the Church in the United States in these opening decades of the 21st century."

It is not just words however and training that forms men of God. Pope Francis told a gathering in 2021 that the actions of the Church leaders are some of the most important ways priests and those in formation learn.

We, as the faithful, also live our lives as we see the Church leaders do but the priest alone is ordained to the ministry, both of the Word and of the Sacraments.

Christ's services of salvation need the expertise of the laity today and a truly wise

pastor seeks and accepts it. But the wise parishioner recognizes that the pastor is endowed by a different and specific grace to lead the people of God in the parish. Several Sacraments can only be performed by a priest and it is that specialized knowledge and grace that is imparted to the faithful but contained in the men of God. So, cooperate with your pastor, listen to his words from the pulpit. His words are truly those of God's. The priest has been placed there by God to do His work on your behalf. We need to recognize how important this understanding of the reality of Holy Orders really is. One way to support those in formation, and priests and brothers is to spend some time this Lent in prayer for their spiritual needs.

Prayer for Priests

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.

Through them, we experience your presence in the Sacraments.

Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.

Set their souls on fire with love for your people.

Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.

Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.

Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.

Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest.

Amen. ■

A THEOLOGIAN WHO EVANGELIZED ST. ANTHONY

Today with constant attention being given to what theologians might do about thinking and philosophizing about the faith, it is instructive to harken back to St. Anthony. This brilliant saint, often called the first theologian for the Franciscans, saw his responsibility clearly to preach the truth even in the most modest circumstances. St. Anthony was a scholar from his youth and a truly holy man who sought solitude for prayer and study. He would have spent a comfortable orderly life in prayer. Instead, he sought to imitate Christ and believed the Franciscan life gave him the best chance of doing that. As you may know, his first passion was to be a missionary. He wanted to travel to foreign lands and preach the Good News to people who might not hear it otherwise. As is the case often, God had other plans for St. Anthony.

And so, Anthony – the brilliant, noble born scholar – spent most of his life helping those who know the most about God, the holy people that made up the church of his time.



Anthony, who worked within the walls of the friary also preached from village squares, bringing many people into the

churches, people who may not have felt welcome otherwise. He did not hesitate to argue the truth with princes and nobles who might find church teaching an inconvenience. Something we are aware of in our own time. The faithful can find deep resistance when extolling the virtues of a saintly life and the true path God has put out for us. It is here where we pray to St. Anthony for strength.

The genius of Anthony was that he could speak to the nobles, to the friars, to the common people and the poor. Anthony's fire and true love of Christ transcended any social or economic barrier. He was somehow available to speak to the plight of the poor, imprisoned, the sick, the men and women who never had a chance to learn to read or write about their experiences. He spoke the truth in clear language that people could hear, understand and apply to their own lives.

Anthony was always true to his theological vocation, he lived it. Our lesson today is that theology is a very practical calling – not in an ivory tower or relegated to those who have multiple degrees or offices. Even going back in history, it is clear that the best and the brightest among theologians were missionaries as God called them to be preaching and spreading the Gospel. We can become theologians; we can put in the work to learn the faith and then with our heart and soul proclaim it for all to hear. ■



FMA Focus is also available online at <https://franciscanmissionassoc.org/fma-focus-newsletter/>

Selected articles are available with audio.

Director's Letter

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

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Dear Friend of the Franciscans,

The new year, 2023 is underway and the church ushers in another season of Lent, described as the “time of truth.” A time to examine ourselves truly and without a soft lens. How are we living the Word of God? How are we “loving our neighbor as ourselves?”

In a Papal message St. John Paul II, when he was Pope, described our responsibility during Lent.

“Lent is a time that makes us think about our relationship with “Our Father;” it re-establishes the order that should reign between brothers and sisters. Lent is a time that makes us jointly responsible for one another; it detaches us from our selfishness, small-mindedness, meanness and pride; it is a time that enlightens us and makes us understand better that we too, like Christ, must serve.”

We often treat Lent as a short-term solution for a long-term deficit. If we are not truly giving, of ourselves, of our minds and hearts to the church, are we truly listening? If we are only giving during Lent what is above and beyond what we need, are we truly sacrificing? Seven weeks isn't very long, but if it is the only time we give during the year spiritually and physically it can seem like it is endless.

Decide this Lent is the beginning of a new way to look at giving, not as a short-term kindness but as a new way of life for you moving forward, past Lent and into your day-to-day existence. Giving is the best way to receive, this we know – let's practice that. We see when we give that we are blessed with riches beyond compare.

God bless you all during this Lenten season,

Fr. Robert, OFM

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

VISITING VALLEY OF THE ANGELS IN GUATEMALA

by Fr. Joseph, O.F.M.

In August 2022 I went with a parishioner, Tom, to La Valle de Los Angeles. Tom had fundraised and shipped backpacks of supplies there and we wanted to see the place for ourselves.

Our plane landed in Guatemala City on Monday morning. Fr. Joaquin and an aspiring seminarian, Manuel, met us in the thronging crowds outside the airport. Manuel drove us through the winding hilly streets beyond the city limits, half an hour to Valle gates. Motorcycles were everywhere, some with three or four people packed on. We were grateful for our expert driver!

As we drove the tree-lined roads around the property, gazing at the big brick church in the main plaza and the other brick buildings spread out on the hillside, Fr. Joaquin spoke about The Valley's mission. "Ever since Fr. Rocco founded it in 1993, it's been a place of safety and opportunity," he told us.

We passed a smaller, newer building, its walls all windows. Inside the high school girls were listening to an instructor. Everyone had aprons and masks. It was a bakery, another example of the expanding opportunities available for the kids of Valle.

The kids were eating lunch. We walked around and Fr. Joaquin chatted and laughed with them. We went into the kitchen to watch the cooks stirring giant pots of rice and beans. Then we met the administrative staff – Luisa and her team.

Luisa gave us a walking tour and spoke about the programs. Education, counseling, English classes, music. She showed us the medical building with new dentist chairs and explained how they got through

the Covid pandemic. It was amazing to see and hear.

Later that night we were hosted by one of the Board of Directors, his house overlooking the chaotic galaxy of Guatemala City streetlights. Other members of the Board joined the dinner. They spoke about supporting Valle and its project. Our host excitedly described how they were taking the kids to an amusement park. "They haven't been able to go since Covid," he said, grinning. "They can't talk about anything else!" We found out later that it had rained that day, but they still went and had a great time.

During the week Tom and I heard music from the main hall. The kids were practicing. On Friday, we gathered there, and they performed a small concert on marimbas for us. The students of Valle beat out fiesta tunes on the giant wood xylophones. They thanked us for the donations of backpacks and supplies. Hugs and smiles. One girl sang a worship song, her voice swelling the wide spaces of the hall.



We ended our stay with Sunday Mass. The high schoolers from the bakery were selling their pastries outside the door. There were familiar faces of people we had met during the week. Newly ordained Fr. Victor, who had lived and ministered at Valle for about a year, celebrated and preached on Hoping in Christ. Carmelite sisters sang and played guitar. After, we visited the crypt below where Fr. Rocco lay at rest.

Fr. Rocco had a simple motto: "Give the poor the best – not the leftovers." At Valle, Tom and I saw kids encouraged to be their best, by people willing to give their best. We left with memories, hope — and an echo of marimbas playing. Christ is alive in Valle. ■



TABLE TALK

Fr. Jack, O.F.M.

I know that many of you have extremely busy lives and when it comes to having family meals not every member of the family may be present. Life in the missions can also take on a similar characteristic due to the demands and circumstances of each friar in fulfillment of his particular duties, either within a parish setting, a school, a clinic, a humanitarian outreach apostolate, evangelization via radio or TV, or an administrative position. These obligations can reduce the opportunity for communication at any table. So, we try to be faithful to a particular day when all can join in with narratives of their personal activities.

In the missions, Table Talk at the AGAPE friary, especially at the noonday meal, can last almost an extra hour. Each friar shares anecdotes of his past ministries, formation, most recent activity, and his personal history. At times I just sit in amazement at the way certain topics of conversation seem to arise out of the blue, a humble fact or even austere silence. It is almost as you throw out a word or situation and everyone has a green light to chime in. And boy oh boy the plethora of stories that almost seem interconnected by each friar at the table.

With regard to ages and experiences, many of our chats include formation events or antics. However, topics of historical and ecclesial movements run the gauntlet of individual perspectives, personal studies, opinions or added knowledge just from sharing. With different ideas attitudes, views and beliefs, you cannot leave the table less satisfied, and I am not only talking about the food (which by the way is prepared with loving care). Fr. Mauricio, a librarian and Church historian, constantly

imparts tidbits of trivia connected to certain historical events that have had an impact on tradition and other common beliefs that affect the way things have been done through the centuries and even in modern times. Fr. Jaime is noted for his expertise in language and the current, and past, local, political atmosphere which at times gives the flavor of partisan rhetoric. Fr. Victor is a “question box” of “how” and “why” and “what” and “when” that keeps the conversations rolling and is always amazed at the wonders that surround us. Our postulant, Luis refers to that which he is accustomed to which is life with family, especially his grandmother and her explicit words of wisdom. I, on the other hand, have had multiple experiences and stories too of our formation period, both in Troy and Catskill, New York as well as in Guatemala: priestly ministry in parishes, houses of formation in Guatemala and Honduras; active duty time with Marines in Europe, the Philippines, Okinawa, Hong Kong, Bosnia, Iraq, high school ministry and now in El Salvador as the President of the Association AGAPE of El Salvador.

The Table Talk in our community is always interesting and very informative which helps to understand each person’s viewpoint and knowledge concerning worldly happenings and fundamental beliefs without any critical responses which might offend the brothers. Beginning each meal with prayer and ending our conversation time at the table with prayer keeps us joined to the Giver of the gifts shared and grateful for the enjoyment of having share them. Included in our prayers, of course, are those of you who so graciously contribute to our missionary efforts as we work for the good of those less fortunate that they, too, may have a table around which to share stories of love, food, family and God. ■

Words Worth Noting



You must practice first of all what you desire to teach others.

St. Bernardine of Siena

The great truths are too important to be new.

Somerset Maugham

Men more frequently need to be reminded than informed.

Samuel Johnson

The true nobility is being superior to your previous self, not to other men.

Hindustani proverb

The truth is like a lion you don't have to defend it, let it loose and it will defend itself.

St. Augustine

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

Rick Warren

Our labor here is brief, but the reward is eternal.

St. Clare of Assisi

He who laughs.....lasts.

Erma Bombeck

Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Father Robert,

I prayed to Our Lady of Lourdes to intercede for me and ask her beloved son, Jesus to help in a personal matter. I am so grateful to Our Lady of Lourdes for answering my prayers. Don't ever get discouraged if your prayers are not answered immediately, as she hears you and your prayers will be answered in due time. Thank you again, Our Lady of Lourdes and Jesus.

S.D.
River Ridge, LA

Dear Father Robert,

Thank you for the rosary booklet. It is wonderful, very helpful with my meditations and beautifully done! Your FMA Focus is great as well! Very interesting, educational and written for clear understanding. Such super work. Thank you. May God bless you and richly reward you and your entire Association. I will keep you all in my prayers.

Sincerely,
J.H.
Gettysburg, SD

Dear Father,

I want to thank St. Jude and St. Theresa for many favors granted in my life.

D.H.
Portage, PA

Dear Father Robert,

I recently ordered several religious items and would like to thank you so very much for your speedy response. They were for a young man entering the service and he was very pleased with them. The statue of St. Jude was beautiful and I know he will keep it with him at all times. Since I didn't give you much time when ordering, I'd like you to know that they arrived just in time before he left. It was greatly appreciated.

Yours Truly,
P.B.
Reading, MA

Dear Father,

Thank you for the prayer booklets and holy cards. Your generosity is a reminder to us that we are not forgotten, and your gifts will be put to good use. May the God of all consolation bless you in every way.

In Jesus Our Lord,
S.N.
Greencastle, IN

Easter - Life after the empty tomb

Often when we think of Lent and sacrifice we think of the Cross. That ultimate most terrible instrument of torture and humiliation during the time of Christ.

Today the Cross is adopted by those who wish to evangelize through jewelry, or art or even sculptures at homes, classrooms and offices of Catholic schools and parishes. Yet there is another symbol that Christians from the earliest times associated with the Resurrection: the Empty Tomb. Every contemporary of Jesus who saw the Empty Tomb after Easter had to ponder what this meant. The astonishment of those who witnessed it firsthand is recorded in Scripture.

Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away, so she ran off... (Jn 20:1-2)

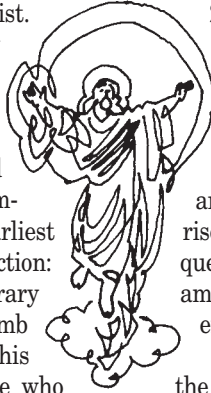
From the beginning the Empty Tomb was a frightening symbol. So, beyond their understanding that even the Disciples and the Apostles could not open their hearts and minds to the reality of the Empty Tomb.

When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there and the cloth that had covered His head not with the burial cloths but in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the

tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead. (Jn 20:6-9)

The clear message of that Empty Tomb: that Jesus is Lord, God among us. Yesterday, today and always. Not all the disciples were able to wrap their own heads around the news that the Lord has risen. To us today it seems without question, but not so at the time, even among the most ardent and true followers of Christ.

It would seem doubtful that all of the Roman soldiers, or the members of the Jewish High Priesthood, the Levites, or the Roman Guards, became Christians. They had their lives and their beliefs. To change is so difficult, so wrenching. Still thousands did in part because of the Empty Tomb, and the realization that Jesus is God and is with us always. Thousands, not only Jews, but Gentiles as well as we know from the Acts of the Apostles, become followers of the Way and called themselves Christians. We, today, live with the realization that the Empty Tomb is the greatest sign of our faith. It demonstrates that Christ is risen. Our faith is real. Our beliefs are true. Easter is a great feast because it marks the beginning of a new age – Christianity. Easter is a feast for us because we too see the light of the Empty Tomb. ■



ST. ANTHONY'S BREAD

Offerings in honor of St. Anthony, either in petition for a favor sought, or in thanksgiving for a favor received, are used to assist the poor. Thus, they have received the name, St. Anthony's Bread. Such offerings are also used to help educate priests and religious.

Fr. Robert will gladly send you a leaflet explaining the origin and purpose of this devout practice, now centuries old. Please write:

St. Anthony's Bread, Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 3235, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

A GIFT OF SELF - THE GREATEST GIFT

All the books about parenting make the point that nothing can replace the gift of self to the child.

A gift of self is expressed in attention, listening with your heart as well as your ears, sharing time, going to church together, praying together and hearing your child's prayers.

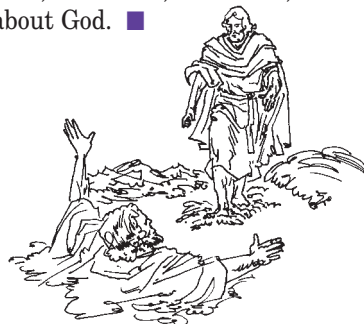
We all know today, giving of yourself is not something people talk about and encourage. Often, the onus is on parents and adults to show children their "work ethic" in all endeavors. Overtime, weekends, evenings, all time that could be spent nurturing a relationship is spent chasing ambition and running from the fear of becoming obsolete. But that image, the workaholic is not one that helps you grow in spirit or even become a successful role model to your children. Instead, children grow in character when you give them the time to become a part of your life: when they see you caring for an elderly relative or neighbor, when they see you offering time in prayer, in adoration or in support of your parish. In those few hours which you have away from work, you must make a special effort to be with your family whether it is parents or children or even a spouse. But God, too, wants your gift of self as well. He wants you to spend time with Him, thinking about Him, finding ways to live in His presence.

Easier said than done for certain. Saints have often referred to their time with our Lord as "wasting time with God" – thinking about God but even more importantly, knowing and explaining to our children and grandchildren

that we live in His presence always. He is with us as we wait in line for coffee, when we are fighting traffic to get to work and when we are consoling someone who is lost or has lost a loved one. Working on our earthly and eternal relationships must take priority over the television, our phones or tablets. Making the mysterious, personal presence of God welcome in our hearts and allowing that ever-growing relationship with the Lord to free us and shape our lives. Surprisingly we will have MORE time for important relationships with others when we put God at the center of our lives. He will remind us that giving of ourselves is what brings us true joy and peace.

Lent is the perfect time to reflect on this pivotal relationship with God. And more than that to do something about it. The ways of growing in our relationship with God are as varied as we are as individuals. Try going to daily Mass, there is usually a noon one, or use your lunch hour. How about praying an additional decade of the rosary every evening with one intention in your heart? These are other ways to allow God to become a prominent part of your every day.

This Lent, when you think about how to please those you love with your presence, attention, and care, don't forget about God. ■



Pray for the victims of Cancer (St. Peregrine)

So many of our lives have been tainted by cancer. To family members, friends, the dreaded and often deadly diagnosis is abundant, especially as we age.

For health care providers, such realities, deadly diagnosis or painful conditions, are daily events. Nurses, doctors, nursing home and hospital personnel all deal with thousands of people old and young who face certainty of death with terminal cancer.

St. Peregrine, the patron of those suffering from cancer has been a faithful guide down the centuries not only for the patients but for all their families and friends who struggle to support a frightened and suffering loved one.

St. Peregrine is a special friend because he knew himself what such health struggles entail. Both as a patient and caregiver. He was reportedly hardworking, seldom, even taking time to sit. He was busy much like most people today. And then he himself began to suffer from a leg and foot disease that was eventually diagnosed as incurable cancer. A death sentence at his time.

We know Peregrine did all he could. He sought and submitted to the best that medical knowledge had to offer. He prayed and asked for the prayers of others – just as he would advise others to do when faced with grave illness. And he surrendered himself to God and to God's will, especially one night in his monastery chapel. All his suffering, all his pain, all his achievements, all his failures. He

understood that he must open himself to God and submit with pure humility and only then would he be in true communion and feel the presence of our Lord.

We know that on that prayerful night, in the chapel, his cancer was healed by a miracle. It was a miracle that saved Peregrine from amputation and long suffering. This allowed the great saint to continue to dedicate his life to the service of our Lord.

When our time comes as a patient or as someone who supports another through pain and suffering, through the maze of dealing with life and death issues, it is good to pray to St. Peregrine for help and guidance. And to ask that we may model ourselves on his way before God in faith and hope and love.

While we pray to Peregrine, we want to ask not just for a cure but also for spiritual healing and for strength of heart in the face of potential tragedy. For the greatest tragedy is not physical illness but rather spiritual despair. In everything, God is there to guide and sustain us, if we open our hearts and lives to God's healing presence.

Prayers to St. Peregrine, the patron of those suffering from cancer, should ask not only that they be cured, but also that the victims, their families and their friends, not lose heart at what seems such a great tragedy. For the greatest tragedy is not physical ills but spiritual ones, as St. Peregrine well knows. ■

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Father Robert includes a special remembrance for all Franciscan Mission Associates on their birthday if he knows when it is. To be remembered at his Mass on your birthday please send him the filled in form below at any time.

My name is _____

My Birthday is: Month and Day _____

My address is _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Fr. Robert, O.F.M., Dept. 3234,

Franciscan Mission Associates, PO Box 598, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

FMA Spiritual Exercises - Lent-Easter 2023

For the petitions and special intentions of all our benefactors, Franciscan Mission Associates will conduct this series of spiritual exercises during the Lenten and Easter season.

You are cordially invited to join us in prayer for your own needs and petitions, for those of our Franciscan Missionary Friars and their people, and for all who cooperate by prayer and sacrifice for the spread of the faith.

During the Lenten-Easter Season these Novenas of Masses have been arranged:

February 2-19Our Lady of Lourdes
February 22 - April 2Lenten Masses (40)
March 28 - April 5Feast of Easter
April 9 - April 17In Thanksgiving for the Risen Christ
April 11 - June 69 Tuesdays to St. Anthony

Holy Mass is offered each day for all Franciscan Mission Associates benefactors and the special intentions they request. Kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

**Father Robert, O.F.M., Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 3231, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

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