

FMA FOCUS

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

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

VIRTUE: HEALING



The virtue of healing is one that is often overlooked or not considered in daily life. We should take its meaning in the broadest sense; not just the healing of the body, but the healing of the spirit. Advent is a very good time to forgive old wounds, especially family wounds, to seek out those with whom we have a quarrel and seek to heal that break. Spiritual healing is an active virtue. We should cultivate and seek it in our own lives. Prayer is the best place to start, and St. Francis gives us a perfect and easy-to-navigate roadmap:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. ■

Oh Lord, help us welcome your gift of self



The greatest gift we receive at Christmas is the gift of Jesus. But also of great value is the gift of our own life. Every life is valuable. That is why every child deserves the best that we can give them. That is why our responsibility now is to share that life, with the whole world, through evangelization, so that all may welcome this gift we celebrate at Christmas. In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it is easy to lose sight of who we really are. We get caught up in material pursuits, striving for success, and seeking external validation. Yet, amidst all the chaos, there is a Divine gift waiting to be embraced – the gift of self, bestowed upon us by the Lord.

Each and every one of us is a unique creation, formed in the image of God. We possess inherent qualities, talents,

and capabilities that make us who we are. However, in our quest to conform to societal norms and expectations, we often overlook these precious gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon us.

The journey of self-discovery begins with an understanding of our own worth. We must realize that we are not defined by our possessions, achievements, or social status. Our worth comes from our very existence as God's children. We discover that worth by embracing our authentic selves, by acknowledging the inherent beauty and potential that resides within us. When we recognize and appreciate our own worth, we can start to live a life that is true to ourselves, rather than trying to fit into someone else's mold.

Welcoming the gift of self requires us to cultivate self-acceptance and self-love. It means embracing our strengths and weaknesses, our successes and failures, and understanding that they are all part of our unique journey. The Lord has gifted us with the ability to learn, grow, and evolve as individuals. By accepting ourselves unconditionally, we create a fertile ground for personal growth and transformation.

Welcoming the gift of self involves honoring our passions and dreams. Each one of us has been endowed with specific interests, talents, and desires. These are not mere coincidences but rather intentional gifts from the Divine. When we

listen to our hearts and pursue what brings us joy and fulfillment, we align ourselves with the purpose for which we were created. In doing so, we not only find contentment and happiness, but we also contribute our unique gifts to the world, making it a better place. In this journey of self-discovery, we must also remember that we are not alone. The Lord is always with us, guiding and supporting us every step of the way. Through prayer, meditation, and spiritual connection, we can tap into the wisdom and guidance that the Divine offers. It is in this sacred space that we find solace, strength, and the courage to fully embrace the gift of self. ■

Did you know...

You can continue to carry on the work for the missions and the people they serve by remembering them in your estate plans. These legacies of love can be made in many different ways to fit your individual circumstances. Consider making a bequest of whatever you wish to: FRANCISCAN MISSION ASSOCIATES, Mount Vernon, NY 10551. If you wish additional information about making a will, please feel free to contact:

**Father Robert, O.F.M.,
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SPEND ADVENT WITH ST. FRANCIS

Advent, a time of waiting can be difficult if we wait alone. So why not develop a simple advent plan to help you prepare for the feast of Christmas and invite St. Francis to join you. Find your favorite prayer attributed to St. Francis – like the Peace Prayer. Here are a few lines to begin.

Let me be an instrument of your peace

That should be a simple model to follow, although it is not always easy. Be the peacemaker in the family fight, be the peacemaker in the office jealousy problem, be the peacemaker in the Church council meeting. Always be the peacemaker instead of giving in to road rage on the highway. Too much time watching and listening to angry, possibly biased personalities on television or the radio can make our fuses short too. How do we resolve this? The same way that we resolve anything. Look outside yourself. That person in your family fighting with you may be remembering a long-lost hurt. Try talking with them or, even better, listening!

Where there is despair, hope

This doesn't just mean that we HOPE everything will be better and work out perfectly. This hope is instead the knowledge that God loves us and no matter what the

trouble or woe, God will be there to welcome us home when we pass this time of trial and see Him face to face. This hope is what gets us through small disappointments and greater losses like the death of a loved one. This hope is our gift to others in our lives who may not have the strong faith we do, who need this lifeline when they are drowning.

For it is in giving that we receive, pardoning that we are pardoned

This is perhaps the hardest part of the prayer to follow. As faulty humans we are designed for self-preservation. We instinctively want to do whatever we can to make ourselves feel better. Being confronted with the reality that we are better off when we give and forgive turns our sensibilities upside down. Try it. Try giving, even when it is hard. Next time you argue with your family member forgive first, don't stand your ground, and then wait to see what happens. In doing this we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and our beloved St. Francis, the humble preacher who gave up everything and joyfully became a true follower of Christ.

Spend time during Advent meditating on what these words really mean. Francis did all he could to live by these words. Pray for his intercession. He is still there to help you. ■

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. 2235, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

Remember your great dignity as a Christian

Scripture makes it clear that God made each and every person in His image.

“Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:26-27)

Especially at Christmastime when the focus can be pulled away from the birth of Christ to the banality of our own world, we must remember as Christians we are not simply “people” of earth. We are creations of our Lord, every one of us, made to live with purpose and power, to live a holy life.

St. Leo the Great in one of his sermons for Christmas took the occasion to remind us that our dignity as Christians is immense. You now share in God’s own nature. You are a member of that body of Christ. So, says Leo, don’t ruin it for yourself.

“Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and become a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member. Recollect that you were rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God’s light and kingdom.” (Sermon 1 on the Nativity of the Lord, 3)

St. Leo the Great, a Doctor of the Church is reminding Christians that at Baptism we were made the temple of the Holy Spirit. We can never be reminded enough that our bodies are holy – as are all others – and that Christ came to make all people free and to give dignity to sinners and pagans as well as believers. No one is shut out from the joy of the redemption.

Pope Francis consistently lets us know that our Catholic faith is a welcoming one that recognizes the dignity in all peoples regardless of station in life.

“The world exists for everyone because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of color, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.” (Pope Francis, *On Fraternity and Social Friendship [Fratelli Tutti]*, no. 118)

How can you live this truth? Do not do anything which would debase the dignity either of others or of yourself. Because, as Leo says, your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ. ■



EMBRACING FAITH FORMATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Have you ever thought that Saints like Saint Anthony had no computer, no phone, not even electric lights – none of the modern conveniences that are aids to learning. Yet they managed to achieve great knowledge and wisdom. This knowledge was not infused into them. They studied and prayed consistently. They learned how to speak new languages, to write their thoughts and insights down, and to correctly express the truths of the Catholic faith. They never gave up on their desire to grow closer to God and to help others do the same. And they did so with humility, never trying to draw attention to themselves.

These days the world is literally at our fingertips. If you don't know something, search for it on the internet. A wealth of knowledge comes right up, and we can access it as quickly as pressing a few buttons on our phone. Previous generations have had to work much harder to find the same information we have available to us so easily. Shouldn't this easy access give us more ability to learn our Catholic faith? There are abundant resources available to learn about the Saints, the Sacraments and the doctrines of our faith. All of these will help us in our journey of faith formation. Pope Benedict XVI in an address during

the Year of Faith (2012-2013) reminded the faithful it is our duty to continue to grow and learn and spread the faith:

What is faith? Does faith still make sense in a world in which science and technology have unfolded horizons unthinkable until a short time ago? What does believing mean today? In fact, in our time we need a renewed education in the faith that includes, of course, knowledge of its truths and of the history of salvation, but that is born above all from a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ, from loving him, from trusting him, so that the whole of our life becomes involved.

We may claim to study doctrine or to learn about the lives of the Saints. But, like the Saints, we must never give up. Articles, webinars, podcasts, Catholic television and even good old books are just some of the ways that we can easily access information. But are we making our faith formation a priority in our lives? We may not be taking the time to reflect on what we need to do in order to become beacons in what is sometimes a dark world. Everything in life that is worthwhile takes time and effort, as the lives of the Saints aptly demonstrates. We can honor their lives by making ours one of true faith and evangelization. ■

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 2234, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

A GIFT FOR THE WORLD; ONE KIND WORD A DAY

There are sometimes people in our lives who can rub us the wrong way. It may be a family member, a friend or a coworker. There are times when we get aggravated at the way someone is carrying out a task, or that they are making you wait, or that they jump in line ahead of you. The Christmas season is often the busiest time of the year, both for business and for us individually. The days can be long and filled with anxiety and anticipation. Facing all this, our tempers can be as short as the cold winter days. This is the best time to turn to prayer, to lean into the Lord's love so that we can send that love out into the world.

During this season of Advent and Christmas, try to offer everyone a daily kind word. Give this little gift when it is least expected, not just to friends, but to those folks who are causing you anxiety and stress. Many of our most notable saints remind us to spread kindness in the face of anger and annoyance. Here is one example from Mother Teresa:

Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

Scripture is also filled with examples of our Lord, reminding us that we can and should be kind, as Jesus was to us, like this one.

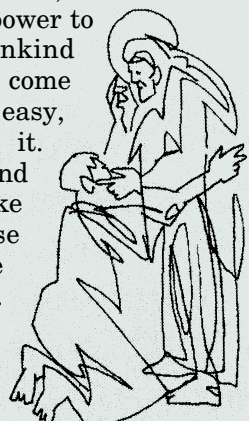
Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion,

kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, referencing the Letter to the Galatians, cites KINDNESS as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It says:

The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: "charity, joy, peace, patience, KINDNESS, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity [citing Galatians 5:22-23]." (Emphasis added)

Being kind is not always easy. However, as Christians, we are able to manage it well with the help of Jesus. And don't forget your guardian angel. You can pray to them for help in a moment of need. The more we act kindly, the more of a habit it will become. Doing kind things will help us in our relationship with God and with others. Having and keeping kind thoughts, however, is far more difficult. We don't have the power to control what thoughts come to us, but we do have the power to drive out unkind thoughts which come to us. It isn't easy, but it is worth it. Kind thoughts and kind deeds make us, and those around us, more joyful people. They also help to give us peace. ■



Director's Letter

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.



Dear Friend of the Franciscans,

Healing is an important part of our Advent journey; healing ourselves so we are ready to welcome Christ into our hearts, and healing our relationships with others so we may welcome them into our lives. It is a gift to know how to heal. It is a gift based in love. If we do not offer love to those in our lives who have wounded us we cannot truly heal.

We know from reading 1 Corinthians that love “is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury (13:5).” That well-worn reading deserves a close look each Advent. We need to heal, we need to forgive, we need to love others. It is the seemingly simple commandment Jesus gives us, but one that is maddeningly hard to follow through on.

To strengthen our own gifts of healing we can grow in our knowledge of God. This beautiful season, spend time with our Lord in prayer. Find time to say a daily rosary, visit a church during adoration, make an effort to truly focus during Mass. Welcome God into your own heart with love and He will love you back, and strengthen your own gift of healing.

May God bless you during this Advent season,

Fr. Robert, OFM

Fr. Robert, O.F.M.

MY JOURNEY TOWARDS EMBRACING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

By Fr. Pierre, O.F.M.

Having been assigned to Rome as formator of our temporary professed friars on their way to solemn profession and possibly to Holy Orders, I am happy to reflect on my own journey thus far, my own formation throughout the years, and on the people who have helped me get here.

A religious vocation is a splendid thing. It comes from God. There's no telling when or how an individual will hear the voice of the Lord calling them to a particular mission in life, but the voice does come. It is a voice that first has to break through our wounds, our past sins, our feelings of inadequacy and at times, even the stubborn mentalities we have formed throughout the years.

Many prophets in the Old Testament were quite reluctant to heed God's call. Moses, for example, tried to deny the Lord's call because he had a speech impediment. And Saint Paul the Apostle, spoke of a 'thorn' he had in the flesh and prayed three times that God would remove it. The Lord commanded Paul to ask no more and told him that his grace would be sufficient.

His grace is sufficient for us also, if we but embrace it and cooperate with it. And no matter how a vocation emerges, there are others who make our journey a little easier and who makes God's plan for us more accessible.

This is where the support and kindness you have all shown us friars plays a vital role. That support and kindness contribute to helping a candidate explore and discern God's call and respond with a generous "yes." That "yes" would never be possible without people like you, who are indeed a part of God's wonderful plan.

I never thought I would be a priest, let alone a Franciscan priest. Given the

relationships I had been involved in, I always thought I would get married. There was love there, but also a void that nothing except the Divine could fill. An accident that should have killed me, coupled with a number of amazing and linked events, led me to a new joy in praying on my own, in my room. Prayer was not new, since we would pray the rosary daily in my family. But praying alone was new. Suddenly, there it was... the voice of the Lord saying, "I am calling you to serve me at the Altar, and then the fruits will abound." I was perturbed by these words, and after several failed attempts to get rid of them, I asked for confirmations from God.

Two clear confirmations came from a spontaneous opening of the Bible (Ephesians 4:1, Acts 15:22), which led me to give a more wholehearted yes to God, return to school, and continue my journey. Yet, something drove me to ask for just one more confirmation from God without opening the



Bible. Lo and behold, a priest I had never met said to me, “The Lord, standing right beside me, said to me – I am calling this young man to serve me at the Altar.” Since these were the exact words I was hearing in the depths of my soul, I have never asked for another confirmation. God had used others to help me discern. I became a friar in 1996, made my solemn profession in 2003 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2005. How amazing to think that I will soon be ordained twenty years, and a friar for thirty.

From my family to the friars and formators I have encountered, to the benefactors who believed in me and were patient even with my flaws, I have always been grateful for the people the Lord has placed in my life to help me unite more closely to him and try to do a little good in the world, especially among his people.

May your own journey be blessed and endowed with grace upon grace. May you continue to see that you are a child of God destined for great things, and eventually for eternal life. Thank you for all you do for our friars in the missions and for all the prayers you pray for our friars in formation. At the moment, we are blessed with twelve temporarily professed in Rome, Italy, one novice in Assisi, Italy, and three postulant candidates in Brooklyn, NY. Yet, we need many more! Ask the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers into his vineyard, which will mean renewed blessings for his beloved Bride, the Church, and for the world at large. May our Blessed Mother, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, invoke our Lord Jesus to send his Holy Spirit upon us, to protect and illuminate our journey. ■



VALLEY OF THE ANGELS: TRANSFORMING LIVES FOR 30 YEARS

In 2023, Valley of the Angels marks its 30th anniversary since its establishment in 1993 as a center for educating and caring for abandoned children. From its humble beginnings with 23 children, the organization has grown to support 200 children in need of guidance and support each year.

Currently, Valley of the Angels provides for 32 boys in grades 1 to 6, and 143 girls ranging from 1st grade to 5th in high school.

Generous support from benefactors has enabled the center to create a nurturing environment for these young individuals to thrive.

Over three decades, Valley of the Angels has positively impacted the lives of over 5281 children, ensuring they receive a high-quality education and the care they deserve. Notably, 132 girls have graduated since 2015, a testament to the organization's commitment to transforming their futures.

Formal education remains central to Valley of the Angels' efforts, offering 11 grades of studies, including diverse programs in music, computer science, and physical education. Beyond formal education, the organization empowers youth with marketable skills through the Angel's Bakery program, enabling them to become successful entrepreneurs. Proceeds from baked goods support the organization's growth and provide for the children's needs.



The Angel's Garden program teaches children to cultivate vegetables, fruits, and flowers, addressing malnutrition and promoting healthy development.



On July 13, 2023, the director, Fr. Joaquin, and

the staff and children of Valley of the Angels gathered to express their heartfelt appreciation and admiration for the generous donors who have played a pivotal role in the organization's success. During the ceremony, both the generous donors were honored for their unwavering commitment to Valley of the Angels, and Fr. Robert, the Provincial Minister, was presented with a recognition award for his dedication to the center's growth and mission.

As Valley of the Angels celebrates its 30th anniversary, the organization remains committed to its vision of providing solid education and moral teachings that empower children to become valuable contributors to society as Christians fully alive in Christ.

For more information, visit www.valleyoftheangels.com. ■

Words Worth Noting



Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any end may reveal a totally new landscape.

C.S. Lewis

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around us in awareness.

James Thurber

One of the most distressing signs of contemporary times is the denial of guilt.

Fulton J. Sheen

You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted.

Ruth E. Renkl

It is better to say one Our Father fervently and devoutly than a thousand with no devotion and full of distraction.

St. Edmund

Things do not change; we change.

Henry David Thoreau

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Martin Luther King Jr.

No one has the right to feel hopeless. There is too much to do.

Dorothy Day

The Lord has turned all our sunsets into sunrise.

St. Clement

Our Readers gladly write...



Dear Father Robert,

My most heartfelt thanks to St. Jude and St. Anthony for answering my prayers and helping us to find a very sentimental and valuable ring. These two saints have been my patron saints for a very long time. Enclosed you will find a check for \$25 to acknowledge my gratitude. I will continue my devotion to them and encourage others to pray for divine help through their intercession.

P.S.
Littleton, CO

Dear Fr. Robert,

Your very thoughtful letter and gift arrived today and words cannot adequately express how I felt to be remembered in such a special way. The rosary and Our Lady, not to mention the Friars, have always held a very special place in my heart. I think I will find it easier to pray the rosary since this gift arrived today.

I will offer the first rosary for world peace. I will keep you in mind and in my prayers as well and pray for a lasting peace.

Gratefully,
M.B.
Arlington, VA

Dear Fr. Robert,

Enclosed is my donation of \$20.00 in thanksgiving for prayers answered through the intercession of St. Jude. My thanks to this great saint and your FMA Focus magazine.

J.G.
Mineola, NY

Dear Father Robert,

I am sending an extra donation to St. Anthony's Bread for this month in thanksgiving for favors being received. I wish to thank the Blessed Mother, St. Anthony, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Jude, and our dear Infant Jesus, who all are working miracles for me. St. Jude needs to know I am invoking him often.

M.F.G.
Kansas City, MO

Dear Father,

I would like to share a miracle I experienced. I was in the hospital, suffering from seizures I used to have. My faith is strong, and I want to thank God for it. I started praying like I usually do, "Dear Jesus, you suffered carrying your cross, please give me some of the same strength your Father gave you to carry your cross." After my prayers, I felt great, I was my old self again. I looked up and in my doorway was a picture of Fr. Woodackwich from my parish and said "Father, you are part of my miracle."

A.C.
Devon, PA

Never give up on the Lord: Seeking St. Jude's Intercession

Perseverance is an important virtue for Christians. The simple saying, "never give up" applies to us. We often slip back into our sinful or harmful ways, even those we might have thought we conquered, and that can be demoralizing. But no matter how often that happens, we must never give up on God or on ourselves. There are many Saints who can be invoked to help us with perseverance in tough situations. One of those most sought out is St. Jude. As the patron of hopeless causes, Jude can be prayed to when we are feeling most hopeless. Though our problems may seem monumental, the intercession of St. Jude is sure to help. Very little is known about St. Jude's life. He was one of Christ's twelve apostles, often in text referred to as Thaddeus or Jude Thaddeus. Tradition tells us that, after Jesus' Ascension, Jude preached the Gospel in Persia, where he died a martyr's death. He healed the sick, brought hope to people everywhere he preached and converted many sinners to the faith.

We can see in today's society that we have instant access to many things; to information, which can be retrieved at any time on our phones, computers and tablets; to health advice, which we can also get on the internet and can help us diagnose certain problems and give us tools to heal. But what about our spiritual needs? Certainly we can get information in all these ways, but when they are all exhausted, we need

to pray. And St. Jude can be a tremendous advocate. Prayer for his intercession is powerful. As we focus on others during the Advent and Christmas season (a good thing), we may lose a little bit of care for our own spiritual wellbeing. This can cause stumbling blocks in our lives. Here are a couple of short prayers to St. Jude that can help you to keep focus during this Advent and Christmas season. And remember that we should never give up.

Prayer to St. Jude

Most holy St. Jude

I invoke you as the special advocate of those in trouble and almost without hope.

Help me to realize that through our faith

we triumph over life's difficulties

by the power of Jesus who loved us and gave His life for us.

Come to my assistance that I may receive the consolation of heaven in all my needs, trials and sufferings, particularly (here make your request)

and that I may praise God with you and all the saints forever.

Amen.

And a short daily prayer for this season:

Prayer to St. Jude during Christmas

St. Jude, help all those who need help. Let all return to Christ this Christmas, whole and entire as they were at their baptism. Amen. ■

Learn more by visiting online www.franciscanmissionassoc.org
or follow us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/FranciscanMissionAssoc

All Saints and All Souls. Truths of Faith

"We are called to offer good works, prayers and the celebrations of the Eucharist to alleviate the tribulations of the souls still awaiting blessedness without end." (Pope Francis)

Honoring the departed is a vital part of our spiritual life as Christians. Although All Souls' Day is not a holy day of obligation, parishioners fill pews, praying for beloved deceased – and feeling especially close to them in the context of the Holy Eucharist. The month of November is dedicated to those who have passed away. On Wednesday, November 1, we honor all the blessed who are in heaven (All Saints), even those whose names we will never know. On Thursday, November 2, we commemorate all those who have passed away and are awaiting the Kingdom (All Souls). These two days begin this month in which we pray especially for those who have died and need our assistance to make the final journey to heaven.

In one of the Gospels available for All Souls' Day, we hear Jesus speak plainly to his Apostles about death – His own, and ours as well:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God, and faith in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise, how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you... that where I am you also may be." (John 14:1-6)

In another of the Gospel choices for All Souls' Day:

"... Indeed, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks upon the son and believes in him shall have eternal life. Him I will raise up on the last day." (John 6:37-40)

Our Lord taught us, unequivocally, that in death, life is changed, not ended.

From the earliest Christian times, baptized people prayed for their dead – hoping to see them again one day. Throughout the year, Catholics often mark the anniversary of a loved one's death by having them remembered at Mass. In this celebration of the Eucharist, they feel especially close – once again – to that celebrated person, now living in eternity.

It is important to remember those who do not have loved ones in the pews, who do not have anyone remembering them. This prayer can be said each day in November for the forgotten ones.

For those forgotten in death

Receive my prayer dear Lord, for those who have no one to pray for them.

Many endured loneliness, war, severe poverty, or natural disaster and departed this world without loved ones to mourn their passing.

Though I may not have personally known them, let my heart be moved by their plight, in life and in death.

I implore you to stretch forth your paternal arms to these forgotten ones and bring them into your celestial abode of happiness, light and peace forever and ever.

Amen. ■

A SPIRITUAL CHRISTMAS GIFT

If you wish to give a spiritual gift for your loved ones or for special friends at Christmas, we suggest a gift enrollment in Franciscan Mission Associates.

Those you enroll at Christmas will share spiritually in the Masses and prayers of all our Franciscan Friars during the next year and in a Special Novena of Masses to begin on Christmas Day.

You will receive beautifully embossed Christmas gift cards, well in advance. Each card is designed to show your name as the donor and the name of each person you decide to enroll. You may mail the gift announcements or give them as you choose.

To obtain additional Christmas enrollment cards, please write today to:

Fr. Robert, O.F.M., Box 598, Dept. 2232, Mount Vernon, NY 10551

Advent – we wait, and we wonder

“Advent invites us to a commitment to vigilance, looking beyond ourselves, expanding our mind and heart in order to open ourselves up to the needs of people, of brothers and sisters, and to the desire for a new world.” (Pope Francis, Angelus, 2018)

The Advent season is a time of preparation. During these beautiful and busy weeks, Christians should remember to focus not on the gift buying or the snow showers but instead on the coming birth of Christ and the second coming of our Lord. Even the early Christians were fascinated by the hope and promise that Jesus would return to them. Our readings during this season remind us also that Advent is not about guessing when Jesus will come so we can be ready. Instead, they are about preparing always for His coming, being always ready for our Lord with our hearts and minds and souls.

Advent begins this year on Sunday, December 3. Mark’s Gospel sets the tone for the weeks ahead. Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore

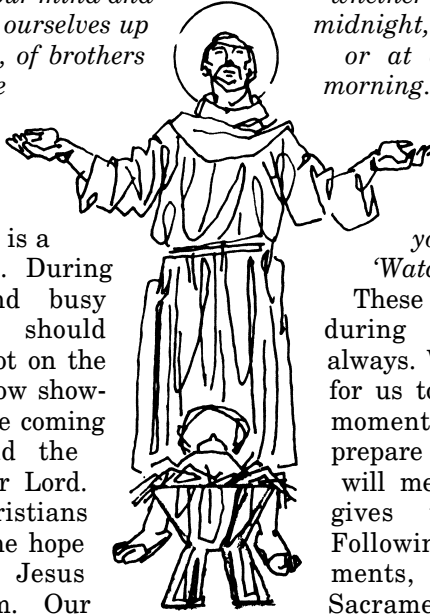
you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: “Watch!” (Mk 13:33-37)

These are words to live by during this season and always. While it is important for us to live in the present moment, we must also prepare for the time when we will meet our Lord. Jesus gives us the roadmap. Following the commandments, receiving the Sacraments, following the teachings of our Catholic faith, and offering kindness to all are the guidelines that Jesus gives us to get us from here to heaven. These things, which we do “in the moment,” also help us to prepare for the future. Pope Francis said the person who is vigilant, and alert is the one “who welcomes the invitation to watch, that is, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by the sleep of discouragement, the lack of hope, or by delusions.”

One great way to prepare our hearts for the Lord is to make a worthy confession. Go with pure intentions and true sorrow for your sins. Jesus knows your heart, and the more you prepare it for his coming at Christmas, the more you will be ready for the joy that it can bring. ■



Special Novena Schedule Advent-Christmas 2023

All year round Franciscan Mission Associates conducts a regular schedule of spiritual and devotional exercises in which all benefactors are invited to take part. During the Winter months the Special Novena schedule is:

November 2-30	Novena for the Faithful Departed
December 1-31	Infant Savior (31 Masses)
December 8-16	Feast of the Immaculate Conception
December 16-24	Feast of Christmas (in Padua)
December 24-January 1	Feast of Christmas (in Assisi)
December 25-January 2	Christ Child Novena (in Bethlehem)

All Franciscan Mission Associates, sponsors, and benefactors are asked to join in prayer for the intentions and petitions of those taking part in the exercises. Please pray also for our Franciscan missionaries, for the people they serve, for an increase in vocations and for all our associates. Holy Mass is offered each day for all benefactors and for the intentions they request. Kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

**Father Robert, O.F.M., Franciscan Mission Associates
PO Box 598, Dept 2231, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**



Franciscan Mission Associates
invites you to a 10-day pilgrimage to the Marian Shrines
of Portugal, France and Spain on April 9-18, 2024

Fátima ☪ Ávila ☪ Segovia ☪ Zaragoza ☪ Lourdes ☪ Montserrat ☪ Barcelona

Dear Father, please send information on this Marian Pilgrimage:

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