

# FMA FOCUS

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Franciscan Mission Associates  
Mt. Vernon, NY 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

## VIRTUE: AWE



We are beginning the season for repentance and rejoicing. Lent is for repentance and Easter for rejoicing. It is a time to recapture our reverence for God's goodness. Reverence requires respect, deference, and awe. These seem out of place in our current society, where we refer to even the president by his first name. Students and young people seem to respect celebrities and fashion designers more than teachers and even parents. Reclaiming our reverential fear or wonder at the power and majesty of the Lord will help us not only to be in right relation with God, but will remind us who and what we are as well. Praying ourselves and praying with our children and grandchildren is one way to begin this process. We should not give up saying grace at the table just because schedules are full. During Lent we can remind young people what Jesus sacrificed for their souls, his never-ending love and forgiveness for us. Having a conversation like that can be a good way to highlight all we owe to God and restore a sense of awe for His power and goodness. ■

## Learning to accept our nature as God's people



The season of Lent offers us an opportunity to get to know ourselves as God knows us. He has given us gifts in mind and in spirit. He has also given us the strength to know that He is our God, and we are His people. Saint Augustine put it well when he said, "God is God, and I am not God." We are dependent on God for every breath we take, but we are equally dependent on God for the grace to know, love and serve Him. It is His Will that we are sustained each day of our lives, both physically and spiritually. Embracing this humility, this deference to the power and majesty of God, does not make us weak. In fact, it takes great strength to put God first and know that we are dependent on Him. This is the true path to heaven. God is all knowing and all powerful. We humans are not. In today's world, where information is so readily available, and knowledge

of many things so easy to obtain, it is sometimes difficult to accept that someone, even God, may know more than we do.

*“The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen.” (Mt. 23:2–4)*

The last sentence of this quote is the important one. The prayer, fasting and almsgiving that we do during this Lenten season should not be done for any reason other than to honor God and make room in our heart for Jesus. It is the season to remember the suffering He endured to save us.

In Matthew’s Gospel we are reminded that God alone is to be worshipped. We are not to put ourselves ahead of God. We know that this is a basic part of our faith, but we too often refuse to put aside our own ego and let our spiritual needs be met. Placing God ahead of self is what

humility is all about. As Matthew’s Gospel says,

*“The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Mt. 23:11–12)*

During this Lenten season, we can concentrate on the frailty of our existence and our dependence on God. He created us, He loves us, and He sustains us. We cannot exist without Him. Remembering this will help us to live humbly, and to give God proper worship and honor. That will make our Lent a very fruitful one. ■

## Remember the Missions in Your Will

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 10551-0598. For additional information, please contact:

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Please address all correspondence to Father Robert, OFM, at P.O. Box 598, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10551. Please send changes of address six weeks in advance; if possible include your mailing label, and give both old and new address.

## SPEND LENT WITH THE SCRIPTURES

The seasons of Lent and Easter are times to focus on the presence of the Living God in the world. One important way to do this is to set aside time to read and pray with the Scriptures. Making time for God's Holy Word is a practice that will aid in our spiritual growth. It becomes our meeting time with Jesus, our Lord, our Brother, our Savior, our Friend. Jesus is God, so spending time with Him is an acceptance of His invitation to share the life of grace, and ultimately, eternal life.

As you begin to read the Scriptures, you may want to take notes and mark up your Bible. Get yourself a good paperback version, or download a copy to your phone, tablet, or laptop. You can then take notes in the margins or type notes into the comment section of your electronic device. You can also highlight passages that are particularly meaningful so that you can reread or share them. As you read, invite the Holy Spirit to guide you so that you can apply the lessons you learn.

You might ask, "Where do I start?" Two good options during this season are:

The Letter of Saint James – This letter has been described as not just a letter but an "exhortation" and is concerned almost exclusively with ethical conduct. This places it within the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature, such as can be found in the Old Testament (Proverbs, Sirach) and in the extracanonical Jewish literature (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Books of Enoch, the Manual of Discipline found at Qumran).

The Letter of Saint James lays out a path that we can always follow, that is particularly appropriate for Lent. This is a time to think of

others first and practice the three pillars of almsgiving, fasting and prayer. James' writing focuses on our need to act on the Word and not just speak it. "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17) Knowing and acting on God's Word will root us in the humility of faith and the truth that we are nothing without God.

The short length of James' letter will allow you to read it in one sitting. Then you can apply its directives throughout Lent.

The Acts of the Apostles – This book of the Bible is particularly appropriate for the Easter season, the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost. Acts of the Apostles is a companion book to the Gospel of St. Luke, written by him to tell us the story of the early Church. In reading it you will encounter rich human experiences and many interesting characters, such as Stephen, one of the first deacons and the first martyr, and Saul, who was blinded by Jesus on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians and became the early Church's greatest preacher. Acts is full of miracles, mistakes, imprisonments, and persecutions, a truly engaging and enriching read. It is perfect post-Easter reading, recalling the commission Jesus holds out to the baptized – *Bringing the Gospel to the whole world.*

It was the Church who formed the Bible, but God who authored it through the work of the sacred authors. Because it is God's Word, inspired by Him, we have a guarantee that it conveys to us the truth about God's action in the world and how our response to His call can get us to heaven. This book has changed the course of history. It can change your life also. ■

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### 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. FMA 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,  
P.O. Box 598, Dept. 3244, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

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## BENEDICT XVI'S CALL TO UNITY, AND MARY'S PART IN IT

Throughout history, Mary has been known by many titles. One of them is Mother of the Church. It is an ancient title, but the focus on it has grown since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. Mary is held up not only as an example of Christian life, but as a source of unity. Jesus gave us Mary as our Mother on the cross, and, as a Mother, she seeks to foster the unity of Christians, as a mother strives to bring unity within her family. The Council Fathers, in their Constitution on the Church, gave us an idea of Mary's special role in bringing about the unity of all Christians. Pope Benedict XVI showed his dedication to this mission in the first message of his pontificate when he said,



*“Thus, in full awareness and at the beginning of his ministry in the Church of Rome that Peter bathed with his blood, the current Successor assumes as his primary commitment that of working tirelessly towards the reconstitution of the full and visible unity of all Christ’s followers. This is his ambition; this is his impelling duty. He is aware that to do so, expressions of good feelings are not enough. Concrete gestures that are required to penetrate souls and move consciences, encouraging everyone to that interior conversion which is the basis for all progress on the road to ecumenism.”*

There are thousands of sects of Christianity. There is much disunity. Dogmas and doctrines are argued over, and different communities of Christians have even gone to war throughout history. This is directly contrary to Jesus' call for unity. While we believe that our Catholic faith is the true faith given to us by Jesus, other Christian churches and communions participate in that truth to a greater or lesser degree (Constitution on the Church, nos. 14-16). We must work for the unity of all Christians.

In these holy seasons of Lent and Easter, remember to pray for Mary's motherly help with this cause so dear to her Son. Pray especially on Holy Thursday for that Unity which Jesus prophesied and prayed for on that first Holy Thursday Night in Jerusalem, more than 2000 years ago.

We may also look to the Magnificat of Our Lady for words of encouragement regarding unity:

**My soul proclaims the greatness  
of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my  
Savior**

**For he has looked upon his handmaid's  
lowliness;**

**Behold, from now on will all ages call  
me blessed.**

**The Mighty One has done great things for  
me, and holy is his Name.**

**His mercy is from age to age  
to those who fear him. (Luke 1: 46–50)**

Praying for Mary's intercession daily will aid in bringing about the unity of Christians. ■

# Confession changed her life: St. Catherine of Genoa

St. Catherine of Genoa, who lived from 1447 to 1510, famously came to self-knowledge through the Sacrament of Reconciliation – Confession.

Catherine was the youngest of five children born to a noble family whose ancestry included two popes. She was described as holy even as a child. At 16 years old, Catherine was married to a young nobleman, Julian Adorno. The first ten years of the marriage were very difficult, as Julian was more a playboy than a husband. He was violent and irresponsible, squandering most of the couple's considerable fortune.

At this point, one of her sisters, a nun, alarmed by Catherine's growing despair, advised her to see the convent chaplain for confession. In that holy sacrament, Catherine experienced a mystical realization of God's love and concern for her. She also saw herself as she truly was – a young woman who was going through the motions of faith.

Catherine returned home with a more positive outlook – celebrating and thanking God for all the good in life, rather than bemoaning youthful dreams turned sour. Her prayerful and cheerful new attitude also turned Julian's life around. He sought forgiveness, returned to the Church, and began studying the Franciscan way. Soon, he took vows as a Franciscan Tertiary (Third Order).

Husband and wife then devoted themselves to the care of the sick and

the poor, residing in the Pammetone Hospital, where Catherine became director in 1490. Shortly after, a great plague marched across Western Europe, killing thousands in its wake. Catherine was affected, and though she barely survived, she was permanently weakened.

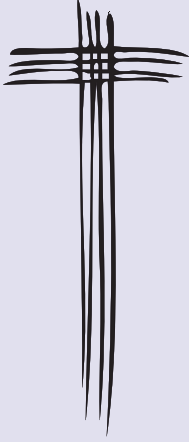
Following her husband's death in 1497, this woman of the Gospel devoted herself to the care of the sick and dying. At the same time, with the help of a gifted spiritual director, Catherine's spiritual life flowered into deeper mysticism. Two books, produced with the help of her confessor, became spiritual classics: *Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body*, and *Treatise on Purgatory*.

Saint Catherine died in Genoa, the city of her birth, in 1510. She was canonized in 1737.

During this Lent, as opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation are scheduled in your parish, remember the transformation that St. Catherine experienced through the grace of that holy sacrament. She found new life as a Christian adult by making a full and honest confession, claiming responsibility for her own choices, decisions, and failures, and seeing the true perils of diving into a vacuous social life as an escape from troubles.

This Lent, ask St. Catherine's help and God's grace to come before Him in this heavenly Sacrament so that we too can reject the "escapes" of our own culture. ■

# THE CROSS AND THE HAND OF GOD - ST. FRANCIS



The Cross of Christ was the major influence on the life and apostolate of St. Francis of Assisi.

In the year 1206, at a crossroad in his life, Francis stopped in a deteriorating chapel at San Damiano. There, he abandoned himself to God's grace. He knelt before the large wooden Icon Cross, still hanging from the wall. In the center was the figure of Christ crucified, bordered by smaller icons above, below and to the sides.

While praying, Francis heard a question, followed by a command to "rebuild my Church, which is falling into ruin."

"Yes, Lord. I will do it most willingly," he replied. He began repairing physical churches, but then realized that the call he received was to rebuild not a building, but God's Holy Catholic Church. Soon, he had gathered other men into his fledgling community, and they set about repairing the corruption and sin that has become so prevalent in the Catholic Church.

The cross became an even greater focus in the life of Francis 18 years after the experience at San Damiano. Now 42, in poor health, he was again at a crossroads in his life. Though still the spiritual inspiration for the Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans), he knew that his time on earth was limited. He returned to Mount La Verna, a

place where he found solitude and peace. There, he sought "the judgment of God" on issues of concern.

During his prayer, Francis asked two graces of our Lord. First to experience "*that pain which You, dear Jesus, sustained in the hour of Your most bitter Passion.*" And second, the privilege of knowing, in some small way, the love of such depth that Jesus could "... *willingly*" give his own life for sinners. It was on La Verna, in the late afternoon of September 17, 1224, that Francis received the Stigmata – the five wounds of the crucified Lord.

Francis had received an answer to both prayers. He experienced a share of Jesus' passion, and in doing so, received an understanding of God's love for the people he created.

Francis expressed his joy and happiness for God's extraordinary goodness in many ways, including composing the well-known *Canticle of the Creatures*. Just months before his death, Francis began his last earthly journey by welcoming "... *our Sister Physical Death*" – as the gateway to Life Eternal.

For Francis, the Cross of Christ, whether in artistic form or in the physical suffering of the Stigmata, could never be an image of darkness, for it pointed to the Resurrection, to Easter. It signified the Divine Love from which came the gifts of hope, enduring love, salvation, and eternal life for God's people. Let us pray this Lent that we will have strength to be patient and trust in the Lord when crosses come our way, and to see the hand of God in all things as Francis did. ■



## Website and Social Media

Learn more about the Franciscan Mission Associates by visiting us online:

<https://franciscanmissionassoc.org/>

Or follow us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/franciscanmissionassoc/>

# DIRECTOR'S LETTER

**Fr. Robert, OFM**

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**Dear Friend of the Franciscans,**

Whatever our troubles here on earth, we know God's help is always at hand. The sacred passion and death Jesus endured for us is a true sign of His great love. The stations of the cross, which take us through Christ's final journey, are also a way of salvation for us. As we move through our life here on earth, we should see in each suffering a share in Christ's passion. Pope Benedict XVI, in a Good Friday address to the faithful, reminded us that the events depicted in the stations of the cross sustain us when we feel lost, or alone.

*In times of trial and tribulation, we are not alone; the family is not alone. Jesus is present with His love, he sustains them by His grace and grants the strength needed to carry on, to make sacrifices and to overcome every obstacle. And it is to this love of Christ that we must turn when human turmoil and difficulties threaten the unity of our lives and our families. The mystery of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection inspires us to go on in hope: times of trouble and testing, when endured with Christ, with faith in Him, already contain the light of the resurrection, the new life of a world reborn, the Passover of all those who believe in his word.*

This Lent, make a point of meditating on at least one station every day, whether at church or at home or wherever you are. You might also try to attend the celebration of the stations at your local parish. By meditating on the stations, and on the true sacrifice Jesus endured for our sins, our failings and our own challenges are put in perspective.

May God bless you and your family this Lenten season,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Robert, OFM". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

**Fr. Robert, OFM**

# DREAMS DO COME TRUE, EVEN IF NOT SEEN

by Fr. Jack, OFM

When Fr. Flavian started AGAPE, it was quite an unpretentious adventure of sharing a Christmas meal with some street folk in the parish hall of “La Santísima Trinidad” church in Sonsonate, El Salvador. AGAPE would evolve from these humble foundations to become the most dynamic charitable relief service for the indigent population of this tiny Latin American country.

In the past 45 years, Fr. Flavian’s dream to serve the needs of the poor in El Salvador has grown in its complexity: it now includes elder care, health care, education, and communications (Radio Luz, Radio AGAPE Occidente and AGAPE Oriente and AGAPE TV channel 8). We’ve initiated “Solidarity routes” during the pandemic to distribute food to interior and isolated communities. AGAPE also feeds thousands of hungry families who show up at our

levels of higher learning with accreditation. The numbers have grown, and the government now provides scholarships. Fr. Flavian even received something he never dreamed of: a University named for him.



warehouse on Fridays and Saturdays to receive their monthly rations of whatever we have to offer.

I mentioned education and communication above. Besides nourishing the body, Fr. Flavian knew all too well that education on all levels – from preschool programs to technical institutions – would be key to creating an environment of dignified development. He dreamed the dream of education and now we have those specific

Communications was another favorite area of Fr. Flavian. He started to nurture communities not only with programs of art and culture, but also with programs of moral, ethical and Franciscan values which strengthened the souls of the Salvadoran family. As society became more digitized, television and social media became important. Those who have any handheld device (a cell phone or a tablet) can now “tune in to AGAPE TV.” The digitized world continues the dream of the founder, even if he could not foresee it.

All the things that I am sharing with you, our devoted patrons, loyal readers and contributors to the Franciscan Mission Associates, are the projects which you have supported through the years by your kindness and generosity. They were the dreams of Fr. Flavian, and now they have been realized, through the efforts of those associated with AGAPE and the help of





wonderful benefactors like you. The needy of El Salvador are the beneficiaries of this great work.

With confidence in Divine Providence and your loving support, I would like to mention another dream that Fr. Flavian had, the dream of a hospital in AGAPE. He spoke about it for many years, but unfortunately never lived to see that particular dream come to fruition. After Fr. Flavian's death, I, as president, have had the honor to expedite the development of the hospital. We had an added stipulation that it be not only a medical center, but an education institution. We have recently signed an agreement with medical

professionals that will assist AGAPE in the realization of this dream, the dream both of Fr. Flavian and also of his successor, your humble servant. Our hospital will educate nurses and doctors for the future. I surely hope to see the realization of this dream that Fr. Flavian did not live to see. Dreams do come true, even if we don't see it.

How grateful we would be if you would consider contributing to help us achieve this dream. That gratitude comes to you not only from me, but from all the poor we serve at AGAPE. Our prayers are with you. ■



# AN UPDATE FROM ROME - PRAY FOR OUR MEN IN FORMATION

by Br. Daniel, OFM



After a summer of pastoral and fraternal experience throughout our beloved province, where we received brotherly hospitality from all, we returned to Rome. Rome sweet Rome! We came a little early in anticipation of a joyous celebration – the solemn profession of our brother Marco. Early in the fall, Marco made this profession in the hands of our Provincial, Fr. Robert. What an event to be a part of! In a way, it was like we were all making our solemn profession with him – wishful thinking or living vicariously? Marco has been an integral part of the fraternity here in Rome for the past three years and we are all very proud of him. We wish him many blessings going forward in his ministry.

Although one brother moves on to a new chapter of his vocation, the community here at the Convento was happy to receive with open arms a new member to our fraternity – Br. Kevin. We welcome him to the Convento.

We were honored here in Rome to host our Provincial Minister, Fr. Robert, and our Provincial Definitor, Fr. Orlando, for the feast of St. Francis. As our tradition dictates, we all went up to the General Curia to participate in the transitus, the memorial of our Holy Father Francis' passing from this life. The guardian of the Curia reminded us to rejoice because Francis did "what was his to do" and called us to remember that Christ will also teach us "what we are to do." Tradition

also dictates that we celebrate with a luncheon together as a fraternity. We obliged!

The next month we returned to the Franciscan University, the *Antonianum* to begin classes, each of us at a different level of the 5-year program there. We solemnly inaugurated the year with a Mass celebrated by the General Minister, Fr. Massimo Fusarelli. The Master of Ceremonies (head server) was none other than our own Br. Jack who also organized the liturgy of Br. Marco's profession.

One more point of interest: later that month the community assisted with the rosary procession in St. Peter's Square to pray for the Synod. It was impressive to see so many faithful there with their candles raised in honor of Our Lady.

It's always a pleasure to share with you all a bit of our journey. It helps us to stay close to you. Remember us in your prayers and Masses as we persevere in initial formation, that we may have a rich, productive school year. Rest assured of our prayers for you all! May the Lord give you peace! ■



# Words Worth Noting



*You have a lifetime to work, but children are only young once.*

*Polish proverb*

*A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

*Patience will achieve more than force.*

*Edmund Burke*

*Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may go to heaven.*

*St. Rose of Lima*

*You make a living by what you get, you make a life by what you give.*

*Winston Churchill*

*We must pray without ceasing, in every occurrence and employment of our lives – that prayer which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication with Him.*

*Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton*

*Every man's life is a fairy tale written by God's fingers.*

*Hans Christian Andersen*

*When Christ condemns the Pharisees, make sure He doesn't have you in mind.*

*Quentin de la Bédoyère*

*When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, "I used everything you gave me."*

*Erma Bombeck*

# Our Readers Gladly Write...

Dear Father,

I said this novena to Saint Jude.

*May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us. St. Jude, worker of miracles pray for us. Saint Jude, helper of hopeless pray for us.*

I prayed that my son would get a job. He got called for a job and he started work soon after. My thanks to Saint Jude. I also prayed to the Blessed Mother, Saints Anthony and Joseph. My thanks to them also.

Sincerely,

R.K.

Muskego, WI

Dear Father Robert,

I want to thank the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our Blessed Mother, St. Jude, St. Anthony, St. Joseph and all the Saints I prayed to for a successful operation. I continue to recover and get the help I need. Thank you. Enclosed is a donation and my gratitude. God bless you all.

D.P.

Alhambra, CA

Dear Father Robert,

Please accept my thanks to the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and Saint Anthony for their intercession and answers to my prayers. And for caring for my dearly departed family members who are missed. I am sending a donation of \$25 for the missions. Thank you.

E.D.

South Glens Falls, NY



Dear Franciscan Friars,

I want to thank you for sending me the statue of Saint Anthony. I was so moved by this great gift and was so overwhelmed it brought tears to my eyes. I can't thank you enough for your thoughtfulness. I will treasure this for the rest of my life. Please accept the enclosed check for all the Franciscan Friars. You will always be in my prayers.

L.S.

Elizabeth, NJ

Dear Father,

My thanks and praise go to St. Francis, St. Peregrine and St. Anthony for God's blessings received in recovery from two cancers. Your work is well appreciated.

With prayers and God's love,

P.C.

Bedford, NY

# Converting the World: How You Can Take Part

When Jesus rose from the dead on the first Easter, the message of resurrection was complete and the conversion of the world to Jesus could begin. When He ascended to the Father, He gave the Apostles a commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world. The Acts of the Apostles and early Christian writings describe for us the work of the Apostles and their followers. Thousands were converted through their preaching. These converts would continue to spread the Gospel. What made them so successful? Joy in their faith is a huge part of it. Those who heard the words of the Apostles also saw that, despite persecution, they lived lives of joy. We must have the same kind of joy. Sadness, bitterness and judgment will not bring the errant Catholic home to the Church or touch the heart of the wandering person with no faith and guide them to the path of truth and salvation. Jesus' life was filled with unconditional love, kindness to strangers, peace, forgiveness, and hope. When we, as Christians, exude these characteristics, we just may convince others to take a chance on Jesus. In his first letter, St. John says,

*"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us, that He has given us of His Spirit."  
(1 Jn. 4:11-13)*

We know that our faith is based on God's promise of salvation and the expectation that we are made by Him and for Him and that we will return to Him. Scripture tells us that God is love, and when we show others that our faith is filled with love, light, and the promise of eternal salvation, people are much more likely to join us

and find the peace that only Christ can give, the peace that is in the heart of Christians. Most of us will never be called to be great preachers. We will not enthrall a crowd with our words. But there are things we can do to help in converting the world to Jesus, which is what God wants most of all. Let's list two of them.

First, we can pray a decade of the rosary each day. While we pray, we can ask God's help for those whose lives are devoted to evangelization, especially missionaries and those who preach here at home. Or you could dedicate each Hail Mary to a lost or struggling soul who needs help finding Christ or returning to the Church.

Second, we can show others through our words and actions that we live as Christians at all times and in all places. This will demonstrate what a great gift God has given us in our Catholic faith. Living this way is not always an easy thing to do. Forgiving others, mending fences, and avoiding judgment of others are difficult things to do and require a great deal of grace. But if we show God's love to others and how living in God's love brings us peace and happiness, God will do the rest. We, like the Apostles, will fulfill the call of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations." ■



# Spend Lent Honoring The Year of Prayer 2024

*“In a word, may it be an intense year of prayer in which hearts are opened to receive the outpouring of God’s grace and to make the ‘Our Father,’ the prayer Jesus taught us, the life program of each of his disciples.” (Pope Francis)*

Pope Francis designated 2024 as the Year of Prayer, beginning on the First Sunday of Advent. This Year is not a year about prayer but a year for prayer, a year in which the faithful are asked to take a good look at their life of prayer. The Year of Prayer will offer us an opportunity to increase our relationship with God in prayer, and to remind ourselves, as Pope Francis reminded us in a 2020 address, that prayer is a **dialogue** with God, and not a one-way conversation, or a simple recitation of memorized material.

“The Lord tells us: ‘the first task in life is this: prayer.’ But not the prayer of words, like a parrot; but the prayer of the heart: gazing on the Lord, hearing the Lord, asking the Lord.”

This dialogue opens our eyes to recognize Jesus who accompanies us, as he accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus. But how do we open this dialogue? We know, as St. Paul tells us, that we do not know how to pray as we ought. We need help! When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He taught them the great prayer, the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father. This prayer, from the lips of the Lord Himself, is the model for all prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its fourth section on prayer, lays out a wonderful

explanation of each part of the Lord’s Prayer. (see CCC paragraph 2766)

When we pray, we can also encourage others to open themselves to an encounter with God. During this Year of Prayer, perhaps we can help someone to pray or teach them some of the prayers we use.

During this Year of Prayer, we want to focus on the how, the why and the what of prayer. It isn’t enough to learn prayers that we recite (the what). We need to know how to keep ourselves engaged and present when we pray (the how), and to remember that we pray primarily to honor God (the why).

In these seasons of Lent and Easter, we should attempt to pave the way for a more robust prayer life. One way of doing that is to open ourselves fully to what God is trying to tell us. Use new aids, like books and podcasts, and learn new prayers that fit your style. The Church has such a treasury of prayers that we can **pray**, not merely recite. Another way of deepening our prayer life is by teaching others to pray. For instance, make it a habit to pray with your children or grandchildren before bedtime. Or make sure that you say grace before each meal, even when in public. Not only will this draw you closer to God, but it will help others to know Him better as well. Perhaps your example will lead them to pray. These practices will become habit and will ensure that you do not take even the simple necessities for granted. ■

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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

**Father Robert includes a special remembrance for all Franciscan Mission Associates and their benefactors 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, OFM at Franciscan Mission Associates,  
P.O. Box 598, Dept. 3245, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



## Pray for the caregivers – sustain those who sustain us!

The medical landscape is one that is constantly changing. It has become very complex. Doctors and nurses attempt to diagnose our ailments, yet sometimes it is very difficult for them to do so. These professionals are always in need of our support. Remember to pray for doctors and nurses who often need guidance and insight. A healthy body and spirit are both great things to have. So when you pray please ask the Lord to watch over those who heal our bodies. Our prayers assist them with their complicated job.

At some point in our lives, each one of us needs care. If you are the patient, remember to have **patience**. Research in health care has determined that a positive attitude can go a long way in helping speed recovery in both mind and body. *“A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.” (Prov. 15:30)*

There is a Saint whom we can lean on for this practice. It is St. Peregrine. He has an interesting story. In his younger days, his relatives would never have predicted sainthood for him. In his youth he led a life of rebellion and hostility toward the Church. The change came when, in his youthful brashness, he punched St. Philip Benizi in the face. The punch was not met with anger or violence. Rather, St. Philip turned the other cheek. St. Peregrine was so moved by that gesture that he immediately changed his ways. He became a priest and an

eloquent preacher, persuasive in reconciling sinners.

As an older man Peregrine suffered an ugly and painful foot cancer. The night before he was to have his foot amputated he was miraculously cured while he slept. We have seen a growing devotion to St. Peregrine as those in the Church learn that he is the patron Saint of those suffering from cancer (we at FMA have a great devotion to Peregrine). Many of us have watched as a loved one has suffered and ultimately succumbed to this disease. They need the intercession of this powerful Saint.

To return to our professionals, each day doctors and nurses work tirelessly with those who are in dire conditions. They need the grace to realize that they do not work alone, but that God’s sustaining power is with them. Offer this prayer to St. Peregrine during Lent – for those suffering and for those who care for them.

### Prayer to St. Peregrine

*St. Peregrine, inspired by your own example of repentance, patience, and humility, help us remain faithful to our resolution to walk with renewed strength and vigor in the ways of our Lord. Strengthen those who care for the sick, and if God wills, please obtain a cure for the illness of all of our loved ones through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ■*

# FMA Spiritual Exercises

## Lent – Easter 2024

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 seasons.

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

During the Lenten and Easter seasons these Novenas of Masses have been arranged:

February 2 – 19 .....Our Lady of Lourdes  
February 14 – March 24 .....Lenten Masses (40)  
March 19 – 27 ..... Feast of Easter  
March 31 – April 8.....In Thanksgiving for the Risen Christ  
April 16 – June 11 ..... 9 Tuesdays to St. Anthony

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

**Fr. Robert, OFM at Franciscan Mission Associates**  
**P.O. Box 598, Dept. 3241, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

# SUPPORT AND PRAY FOR VOCATIONS

Encourage and pray for the youth in our homes and missions who are prepared to devote their lives to God and the spiritual well-being of His people. They need the courage to discern and respond to God's call. Join us in daily prayer for God's grace to inspire and sustain devoted servants – brothers, sisters, priests, and religious – for Christ's work in our world today.

**For information write to Fr. Robert, OFM at Franciscan Mission Associates,**  
**P.O. Box 598, Dept. 3242, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598**

