

Fr. Luan Tran
Weekly Bulletin Notes
2021

January 3, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

This epitaph was found on the grave of St. Ignatius of Loyala: “Non coarctari maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est” (“Not to be contained by the greatest, yet willing to be encompassed by the smallest – that is divine”). This is the essence of Christmas! Think about it! God, Whom nothing could contain, has allowed Himself to be encompassed by the smallest! The infinitely great was willing to be encompassed by the infinitely small! Yes, that is the kind of God we Christians worship. He Who is infinitely great has stooped down to our own level. He Who is maximum has allowed Himself to be bound by the minimum! He Who is beyond the greatest thing or idea human beings could ever imagine has deigned to become a little tiny baby! This thought about God has consoled me so much in these COVID times. There were times when I was about to give up on bothering with God, God reminded me of how much He in fact cared about me – me and my petty sins and non-sins, me and my irrelevant worries, me and my trifling concerns! Christmas was a most beautiful reminder of this to all of us, I hope. May we always remember that, regardless how helpless and frustrated we may feel in front of God’s apparent silence, God does indeed pay attention to each one of us. God is so great that nothing, however small, can escape His notice. No prayer of ours ever goes unanswered. No sorrow of ours is ever ignored. And no tear of ours is ever not acknowledged. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and before we even think about asking Him for something, He has already known what He would do to help us! This is how I have been able to continue to pray and to trust in God, even now! As we enter a new year, may we never forget this truth about God! Have a most blessed New Year! God Bless You!

January 10, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Please read the following from the Catholic News Agency (CNA): “On the 8th of December, 2020, Pope Francis announced a Year of St. Joseph, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the saint’s proclamation as patron of the Universal Church. Pope Francis said he was establishing the year so that “every member of the faithful, following his example, may strengthen their life of faith daily in the complete fulfillment of God’s will.” In making his declaration, Pope Francis noted that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the saint’s proclamation as patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1870. Pope Francis said the coronavirus pandemic has heightened his desire to reflect on St. Joseph, as so many people during the pandemic have made hidden sacrifices to protect others, just as St. Joseph quietly protected and cared for Mary and Jesus. “Each of us can discover in Joseph -- the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence -- an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,” the pope wrote. He also said he wanted to highlight St. Joseph’s role as a father who served his family with

charity and humility, adding, "Our world today needs fathers." The year begins Dec. 8, 2020, and concludes on Dec. 8, 2021.'

Personally, I have not met any Catholic who does not have a special affection for St. "Joe"! Years ago, he assisted the Vietnamese Catholic community in Portland in their efforts to purchase the Holy Child Academy property on NE Alameda Drive for their spiritual home. It was an amazing success! St. Joseph has accompanied me all my priestly life and protected me from all kinds of dangers – spiritual and physical. He and the Blessed Mother saved our family through some very difficult crises. At our weekday Masses, I and the daily Mass people always remember to pray to St. Joseph for his protection over our school and parish families. So far, through his help, the darn virus has been kept at bay! We could not have survived this far without him!

I will be out for several weeks for knee replacement surgery and recuperation. Please remember this poor priest in your prayer on Tuesday this coming week.

God bless you!

January 24, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Today is the 9th day of my new knee. By the grace of God obtained through your prayers and mine and others, I have been spared the worst complications. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart - not only because you care about me, but also, and especially, you are the reason for me to be the priest at St. Agatha's.

I went to Holy Mass the first time yesterday and I can't tell you adequately how that event has changed my outlook on everything. I had been living a very regimented and structured life since my discharge. I had my pills and my supplements and my physical exercises that I must carry out regularly and frequently. People had been bringing food and helping me with chores (for which I am very grateful!). The rectory is warm and has all the conveniences and creature comforts. My post-op recovery had been uneventful and without much suffering. But yesterday's morning I felt strong enough to hobble over to church to attend Mass. And I did. And as usual Mass was wonderful. Father Eirvin preached great homily and celebrated Mass devoutly. So everything was as it should be for a Christian at Mass. I was contented at Mass! But I began to notice a profound difference back at the rectory after Mass was long over. My day yesterday, for the first time, was no longer ordinary - in the sense of being just another day in the long series of days of a tedious rehabilitation after surgery. My routines were no longer just 'one damn thing after another"! Now, my very mundane and quotidian existence has been pierced through with enlivening grace! The Eternal has broken through into my utterly uninteresting life - through the Mass. Now, I feel I am not alone managing my pitiful life. Everything has found its rightful place in the great schema of things. Now everything I do makes sense because everything has been elucidated. Now, my prayers are no longer something I do, but my glad response in front of God's great gratuitousness that encompasses my life. Without the Mass, I would be all alone in this world and on this earth trying to handle everything, trying to stay alive, trying to not give in to despair. But just a few minutes near the altar of sacrifice was enough to elevate my daily existence and transform it into one coherent song!

January 31, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

I am doing ok. The only thing is, the days seem to blend together, and sometime it appears to be like Groundhog Day, the movie. Another thing about time: it flies. We are only a few weeks from Lent. Another year, another Lent, another season of grace in which one is invited to take one's conversion and one's eternal destiny seriously.

I am grateful to God for everything. Major events in one's life are truly major learning opportunities: learning to trust God again and even more intensely, learning to accept things one can't control more willingly, learning to let the hands of the Divine Potter to shape one's desires and to bend one's will more readily. And in the end, what does it matter? "It is all grace!"

February 7, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Many years ago, I read these words from Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) and I was struck at the heart:

"But we might also approach the question from the opposite direction and ask: In what does man's wretchedness . . . actually consist? Above all, in his insecurity, in the uncertainties with which he is burdened; in the limitations that oppress him; in the lack of freedom that binds him; in the pain that makes his life hateful to him. Ultimately there is, behind all this, the meaninglessness of his existence that offers satisfaction neither to himself nor to anyone else for whom it might have been necessary, irreplaceable, consequential. We can say, then, that the root of man's wretchedness is loneliness, is the absence of love - is the fact that my existence is not embraced by a love that makes it necessary, that is strong enough to justify it despite all the pains and limitations it imposes."

In these days of recovery, I am experiencing the truth of those words most poignantly. From all the events that had taken place before and all those since, I am confident of one thing: this miserable existence of mine has reasons to continue because I have been embraced by the Love that is stronger than death (because that Love was willing to die a terrible death for love of sinners such as me). Because the Love that embraces my life is also the Logos of the universe, my life with all its limitations and shortcomings makes sense. The last four weeks have been most decisive for me as a Christian - the God that I worship loves me with a love that reaches into my heart and goes with me to the peripheries of pain and loneliness!

February 14, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Lent is coming with Ash Wednesday on February 17. Please read the bulletin for fasting and abstinence regulations. Since many of you are not attending Mass due to the pandemic, I think it is even more critical that we keep in front of our mind the precept of Penance in three areas: fasting, prayers, and almsgiving! May God help us to have a spiritually profitable Lent in preparation for Easter!

The Annual Archbishop Catholic Appeal is here. I am sure we will be receiving our pledge cards in the mail soon. Please fill them out and either mail them to the office or bring them to church. Please don't send your pledge card directly back to the Archdiocese. I

want to personally have a copy of each pledge card so I can make sure we receive proper credits. The Archdiocese needs our contributions now more than ever due to the pandemic. Please open your hearts to the pleadings of our Shepherd the Archbishop!

Lastly, I thank all of you for your support and your prayers! God must have been listening to them because I have been spared the worst complications. And I continue to be hopeful in my recovery. By and through the grace of God obtained with your prayers, I am looking forward to the day when I can walk decently again! God bless you!

February 21, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

From St. Augustine (quoted by TheCatholicThing website): "Today we enter upon the observance of Lent, the season now presented to us in the passage of the liturgical year. . . . For, to my spirit of devotion, it seems fitting that we, who are about to honor the Passion of our crucified Lord in the very near future, should fashion for ourselves a cross of the bodily pleasures in need of restraint, as the Apostle says: "And they who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal. 5:24) In fact, the Christian ought to be suspended constantly on this cross through his entire life, passed as it is in the midst of temptation. For there is no time in this life when we can tear out the nails of which the Psalmist speaks in the words: "Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear." Bodily desires constitute the flesh, and the precepts of justice, the nails with which the fear of the Lord pierces our flesh and crucifies us as victims acceptable to the Lord. Whence the same Apostle says: "I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God." (Rom 12:1) Hence, there is a cross in regard to which the servant of God, far from being confounded, rejoices, saying: "But as for me, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal. 6:14) That is a cross, I say, not of forty days' duration, but of one's whole life, which is symbolized by the mystical number of forty days, whether because man, about to lead this life, is formed in the womb for forty days, as some say, or because the four Gospels agree with the ten-fold Law and four tens equal that number, showing that both the Old and New Testaments are indispensable for us in this life, or it may be for some other and more likely reason which a keener and superior intellect can fathom. Live always in this fashion, O Christian; if you do not wish to sink into the mire of this earth, do not come down from the cross. Moreover, if this ought to be done throughout one's entire life, with how much greater reason should it be done during these forty days in which this life is not only passed but is also symbolized?"

Another Lent has arrived. How can I make this Lent different from all past Lents, which had come and gone without tangible effects on my soul? Same old, same old? I don't think the disciplines I had embraced in the past would work for me. This year, I am still asking God to help me with ideas and with the necessary motivation and perseverance to stay faithful to my Lenten resolutions. Who knows if this Lent may be my last on this earth? The day is far gone. I must be earnest about this. May God help me! May God help us!

February 28, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Sometimes God allows bad things to happen so that good may come of it - but only if we would rise to the occasion, accept reality for what it is, and follow His will without resentment or bitterness. Today I missed my long-awaited six-week post-op appointment. It was my fault - I remembered the time incorrectly. As I was driving like a maniac toward the clinic the office people called me and informed me they had to reschedule the visit. All of a sudden I felt like the carpet was being yanked from under me! I couldn't believe what was happening! All this anticipation and excitement - for nothing! Then I became mad. I thought I would just drive to Costco and walk around inside the warehouse to let my bitter disappointment dissipate. Just then I remembered my dad had a doctor's appointment at that precise moment - an important appointment I had thought I had to miss out on because of my post-op. But now, I was free to go with my dad! And I sped off to Kaiser! And I found him with my siblings in the parking lot just in time!

Now that I have had time to think about everything, I thank God for my cancelled post-op visit with the surgeon. I missed an opportunity to know what kind of progress I had been making after my knee replacement surgery. On the other hand, God granted me the chance to be with my elderly father I had thought impossible. The grace of God helped me rise above my bitter disappointment and my agitation; it helped me regain composure to transcend beyond my annoyed state of being so that I could think about my poor father; it assisted my memory so that I could remember the time of his doctor's appointment. Although I was so upset with my predicament, God helped me to pierce through my feelings and emotions to see the face of my father and stirred up in me the desire to be with him after all these weeks of absence since my surgery. God helped me to arrive there in time so that I was able to walk my father to the doctor's office, while my siblings were trying to find a parking spot. He did make it to his appointment with no problem. What a beautiful gift God has granted me in exchange for a cancelled doctor's visit!

After almost thirty years as a priest, I have begun to detect a pattern: I pray for what I think I would need. But God only gives me what I actually need! Sometimes the one has little to do with the other. Regardless, I know it is my business to pray always, and it is His business to answer my prayers the way He sees fit.

March 7, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I am excited to tell you about our new Facebook page newly created by Sara Hainley, daughter-in-law of Christopher Hainley. Sara and her husband CJ Hainley just moved into Sellwood and they have become an integral part of our parish family. No wonder, because CJ's grandmother was none other than the indomitable Genevieve Hainley! Sara wanted to help us expand our presence in cyberspace and the new Facebook page is part of the effort. Please check it out at StAgathaPDX on Facebook. We are still maintaining our existing page and Karen is doing a great job staying in touch with

almost two hundred registered subscribers. It serves as a bulletin board for our community and it provides a level of security for users.

Now that we are on the threshold of Third Sunday in Lent, I would like to invite you to consider joining us for Stations of the Cross on the remaining Fridays at 6pm. You are looking at a great opportunity to participate in a very traditional and profoundly moving exercise of faith with this devotion. For half an hour, you get to be with fellow parishioners in meditating and praying the fourteen stations of our Lord's Passion. You get to be in church; you get to be in the company of others; and you get to be in front of Him in the Tabernacle! And what you have got to lose?

Now, here is something truly wonderful! Our Knights of Columbus are sponsoring a Linguine and claim sauce dinner to go on the Feast of St. Joseph, the 19th of March, which happens to be on the Fifth Friday of Lent. They will have this delightful dish for you to take home with a small donation on this Friday between 5 and 7pm. The proceeds will be used to install a new wifi system for the church so we can begin to livestream our liturgies for the folks at home.

Speaking of livestreaming, every Sunday at 6pm during Lent we also have Sung Vespers in the church. So far, two of these Vespers had been livestreamed and are now posted on our new Facebook page. Join us, won't you?

We do these things not as some belated reactions to the deteriorating faith life of the parish. But we do these things out of our desire to be with each other in these times - spurred on from the affections we have for each other. We do these things not to solve any problem, but to be faithful to the original need of the heart. We do these things because of Him, in whose Eyes we see our shared destiny!

March 14, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Many years ago I watched a movie with a perplexing title, "What's eating Gilbert Grapes?" I don't remember much of the plot, but I like the name of the movie! I like the name of the movie because I feel as if there is something eating me from the inside! That feeling comes from the knowledge it has been a year since I last saw many of my parishioners. And I don't know how people are getting along without the Sacraments. Truly I am anxious, because I don't know how I would answer the Lord if He should ask me how I have been taking care of the flock entrusted to me. I am afraid I have not been doing a good job. As far I am concerned, I know I could not have survived the pandemic with Mass and Confession. The more I think about everything, the more I am worried for folks many of whom I have not seen for months. I offer Mass for my people on Sunday, and I know that somehow the Lord is taking care of them. But I know also that Christ has given us His Sacraments as sources of grace and strength and life itself, and apart from those Supernatural remedies and nourishment, how can we Christians live?

Anyway, I will have Confession available on the Friday of the Feast of St. Joseph (March 19) before and during the Stations of the Cross. Father Thompson of St. John Fisher will be the Confessor; and he should be here between 5-6:30pm to help you with

Confession before Easter. I will be available for confessions between the two Masses on Palm Sunday.

Please help me to have a few moments of peace for my conscience if you would take up on my offer and go to Confession in preparation for Easter!

March 21, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This past weekend Msgr. Brennan was here offering Mass for us. He was here at St. Agatha's, because I was out of commission. I was out of commission, because I couldn't walk. I couldn't walk, because I had hurt my Achilles' tendon during physical therapy three days prior. Soon afterwards, I began to feel miserable - the right heel had turned bright red. Wednesday morning came and I discovered much to my dismay I had been reduced to an invalid, I had to hop around on one leg in order to go to the bathroom! Pretty pathetic, if you ask me! All Wednesday morning I looked at my right foot and I wanted to cry! I had become afraid that I might be laid up for weeks for this new injury! Negative thoughts came - one after another. Pretty soon they buried me in fear and dread. Then, around the early afternoon, a parishioner contacted me and asked if I would need anything. There was one thing I needed more than anything: to walk again! The grace of God prompted me to ask her to offer for me one Our Father, three Hail Mary's, and one Glory Be. I explained to her that God had healed me not too long before of the same injury, and I was hoping that He would do the same for me if she would ask God on my behalf this time. The kind parishioner said she definitely would pray those prayers for me!

What happened next defies rational explanations - to me, anyway! After the evening Angelus at 6pm of the same Wednesday, I noticed something different about my foot: it was lighter, and the heel was no longer bright red. It seemed as if the pain had begun to subside! This was beyond belief! Not long after that discovery, I was able to walk again! I was overjoyed! If you know how complicated an injury to the Achilles' tendon could be, you would be amazed too! I knew with a heart-felt certainty that God had cured me once again through the prayers people were offering for me, especially the prayers of the parishioner I spoke about earlier! Of course, I did take it easy for the next several days, but there was no doubt that I was on the mend!

This is but one story in the series of stories that has been my life. I feel like the blind man in the Gospel to whom our Lord says, "Go your way! Your faith has healed you!" I, too, have been sent on my way by the same Christ - except this time, it was the faith of another person that contributed to my restoration! This latest miracle is but another verification of my faith so that I could live my life this way, again. This latest miracle from God to me is but one more testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ is not a figure from the past, confined to the pages of history! This latest miracle is but another proof that Christianity is truly an event that is happening now - in my life and in the life of every faithful and believing Christian.

March 28, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I would like to borrow the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch who died a martyr in the year 110 to express my thinking of late: "May the Lord reveal to me that you - the entire community of you - are in the habit, through grace derived from the Name [of our Blessed Lord], of meeting in common, animated by one faith and in union with Jesus Christ - Who in the flesh was of the line of David, the Son of Man and the Son of God - meeting, I say, to show obedience with undivided mind to the bishop and the presbytery, and to break the same Bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ. Take care, then, to partake of the one Eucharist; for, one is the Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with His Blood, and one altar; just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants."

Holy Week is here with Palm Sunday this Sunday. I long to see the faces of those who have been away from the Holy Mass. This would be the second Easter Season when the Church shall continue to be deprived of many of her beloved children. What would a Catholic faithful do without the Sacraments? Spiritual Communion is too abstract a thing. And how would the Church continue without her *raison d'être*? And yet, freedom dictates everything. And love is at the heart of every decision. The parish is not destitute financially, yet. But we have been already desperately destitute of friendships, of companionships, of fellowship - of all the things that go to make up this spiritual family. May God bless us this Holy Week with special graces!

April 4, 2021 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Christ is God's power and God's wisdom not only as one sent by God, as God's Son who is himself God, but as the Crucified One. For the death on the cross is the salvific solution invented by God's unfathomable wisdom. In order to show that human power and human wisdom are incapable of achieving salvation, he gives salvific power to what appears to human estimation to be weak and foolish, to him who wishes to be nothing on his own, but allows the power of God alone to work in him, who has "emptied himself" and "become obedient to death on the cross."

The saving power: this is the power that awakens to life those in whom divine life had died through sin. This saving power had entered the Word from the cross and through this word passes over into all who receive it, who open themselves to it, without demanding miraculous signs or human wisdom's reasons. In them it becomes the life-giving and life-forming power that we have named the science of the cross.

Paul brought it to fulfillment in himself: "Through the law, I died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

In those days when all turned into night about him but light filled his soul, the zealot for the Law realized that the Law was but the tutor on the way to Christ. It could prepare one to receive life, but of itself it could not give life. Christ took the yoke of the Law upon himself in that he fulfilled it perfectly and died for and through the Law.

Just so did he free from the Law those who wished to receive life from him. But they can receive it only if they relinquish their own life. For those who are baptized in Christ are baptized in his death. They are submerged in his life in order to become members of his

body and as such to suffer and to die with him but also to arise with him to eternal, divine life. By St. Teresia Benedicta a Cruce (Edith Stein)

April 11, 2021 Bulletin: Dear Parishioners,

The older I get, the more homesick I become. I have been living here for more than 40 years - almost three times as long as I lived as a child in Viet Nam. God willing I might be able to return to Saigon for a visit before my life on earth is over. There is another feeling of homesickness that is actually deeper: the homesickness for my true home - heaven! Wasn't it St. Augustine who said that we will always be restless until we rest in God? We are made by God for God. And as such we are made "of longing", of "restlessness", of homesickness. And this feeling of homesickness intensifies when we get older and older. Fr. Benedict Kiely in an article in Crisis quotes Cardinal George on this subject: "If the earth is our mother, then the grave is our home and the world is a closed system turned in on itself. If Christ is risen from the grave and the Church is our mother, then our destiny reaches beyond space and time, beyond that which can be measured and controlled."

This past Sunday was our Easter Sunday celebration - a celebration that last 50 days! It was an amazing celebration! Our hearts were filled with gladness and joy as we welcomed the beginning of a new springtime of grace for 2021! Easter Sunday reminds me of my true home and that fact that our Lord and Savior has re-opened for us the way back to our true home, our ultimate destiny. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church is our home away from home! For this I am eternally grateful to God! Happy Easter!

February 21, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

How has Easter changed the world? Easter changes the world through Divine Mercy being unleashed by the risen Lord, so the entire world is soaked through and through with new hope and forgiveness. Divine Mercy is the newness of God, which has broken through the hardness of the human heart and is renewing with grace what has been imprisoned by death. This is the reason why I can't wait for Easter: to celebrate the outpouring of God's Mercy over the entire world and into each and every human soul that is open to it. I myself have tasted the goodness of God bestowed on me in the form of Divine Mercy, and this goodness has followed me down through the years, accompanying me through every event, every happening, and every occurrence. This is nothing beyond God's mercy, and there is no one His Mercy would refuse to touch. Four years ago, my father finally converted to the Faith after almost four decades of resistance. He was baptized into the Catholic Church just before a horrific illness robbed him of his memory and reason. And now, every time I see him, I see the face of a young child snatched away from the clutch of Satan not a moment too soon – all on account of Divine Mercy. For someone like my father, no amount of reasoning or arguing would have worked. But the grace of God that came at the insistent begging of my mother and us children was truly out of all proportions! That is why getting old is not such a bad thing – if God lets me live long enough on this earth, I am bound to discover His boundless Mercy rescuing more and more souls!

April 25, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

The Easter Season is indeed the season of Divine Mercy, which stands in the starkest contrast to the insidious “cancel culture” around us. On the one side is the ruthless and merciless unforgiving habit of a society that has lost its moorings and now has only its own forever-changing standard with which to judge the world; on the other side we have the enduring mercy of God who never stops seeking out the sinner to bring him back to life. The “cancel culture” can never convert anyone from the heart, but the God we worship as Christians touches with His grace the depths of the soul of every sinner who has strayed from Him and calls him back with the tender mercy of a loving father. That is why I love the conversion stories of Rudolf Hoess and Col. Kappler and other notorious criminals. God’s mercy never cancels anyone, but relentlessly seeks out those who have rejected God and His law. Like the Hound of Heaven, God pursues the sinner tirelessly and does not rest until He has rescued him.

May 2, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Recently, I was telling my friend how I wished time would slow down! I was feeling I was getting old much too quickly - way before my time! My friend, a wise priest, responded with a question to me, "Fr. Luan, is your mother still alive?" I replied, "Of course, you know she is alive! Why ask?" He then said something that touched me deeply, "As long as you still have a mother on this earth, as long as you can say 'I am going home to my mother!' as long you are still somebody's child, then you are still a child! You are still young!"

We all have a mother, the Mother of our Lord! She is our Mother and she is ever-young. And so, we are also ever young, for we are her kids! I came across this wonderful article about the month of Mary, the month of May, and I want to share it with you!

"God wills that all his gifts should come to us through Mary" (St. Bernard) It was in Rome, towards the end of the eighteenth century, one fine evening in May. A child of the poor gathered his companions around him and led them to a statue of Mary, before which a lamp was burning, as is the custom in that holy city. There, these fresh young voices sang the Litany of our Lady. The next day, the little group, followed by other children, again gathered at the feet of the Mother of God. Next came their mothers, to join the little assembly. Soon, other groups were formed, and the devotion rapidly became popular. Holy souls, troubled by the disorderly conduct which always increases and becomes graver at the return of the pleasant springtime, saw in these growing practices the hand of God, and they cooperated with the designs of Providence by approving and promoting this new devotion, as a public and solemn act of reparation. The Month of Mary was founded. "This is the month in which, in the churches and individual homes, the most affectionate and fervent homage of prayers and devotions from the hearts of Christians are raised to Mary. It is also the month in which from his throne descend upon us the most generous and abundant gifts of the Divine Mercy."

In our own times, we Catholics, wanting to be close to her always, offer her special presents in May: pilgrimages, visits to churches dedicated to her, little sacrifices in her honor, periods of study and well-finished work offered up to her, and a more attentive recitation of the rosary.

May 9, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

I am writing this article in front of the Most Blessed Sacrament at Our Lady of Lavang Church in Happy Valley. This is where all the priests and the Archbishop have been gathering for the last three days for our extraordinary convocation. So many graces have been poured out on us and so many hearts and souls of priests have been touched by the presenting team of Father John Riccardo. The one thing that has struck me most decisively was Father Riccardo's emphatic statement that the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is overwhelming and each and every Christian ought to be bowled over by what Christ has done for us - so much so that each Christian ought to be able to give his or her life for it! That has been the one thing that keeps gnawing at me for the last couple of days: have I been able to convey to all of you the heart of the Good News - the good news of the decisive battle Christ has won for us over sin and death and the supreme sacrifice He has made for each one of us? Has my life as your priest demonstrated the truth of this conviction for which many martyrs died? Have I been able to help you grasp the enormity of the consequences of sin so that you can truly appreciate the infinite kindness of God by sending us His Son into the world in order to rescue us from the grips of Satan? I don't think so! May God be my source of strength and confidence as we move forward from these moments to actually live with the power of God, Who loves us!

May 16, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Life is not just a series of things - like a constantly flowing stream of happenings and events where it's just "one damn thing after another!" No, our life is a story, a love story, in which God is the main protagonist. From all eternity He had known us. We had been in His mind even before the world was created. He freely chose to make us in His likeness and image. He didn't have to, but He indeed did! He has given us a share in His own divine life through the gift of His inner divine life, the gift of sanctifying grace. God constantly seeks after our souls, longing to unite them to Himself. The Lord is indeed the main character in this great romance, as St John tells us: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us." What a tremendous joy we find when we begin to understand that simple affirmation: God loves me.

What does it really mean to say that God loves each of us? Look at the Cross! There we see Jesus has loved us even to the point of death, and beyond. The cause of that torment and death on the cross was our sins, the sins of all mankind and not just the spite and hatred of the Jews. Christ died to make atonement to God, so that men could reach their eternal destiny. And because only God could make atonement to God, Christ willingly accepted crucifixion for our sake. In doing that, He gave the greatest proof of love which the world has ever known, by laying down His life for his friends. His agony in the Garden before his arrest shows that He clearly foresaw all the tortures and pains which he was to undergo. Our Blessed Lord sweated blood at the thought of what awaited Him. But He did not run away!

We see, then, that God's love is the opposite of human love. When we love someone or something, it's because we are attracted by the beauty that we discover in the other - physical, spiritual, or whatever. We love that someone because something in him or about him pleases us! We love that someone because he or she makes us happy! But

God's love of us is something radically different: God's love for us consists in a free choice to make us good, to make our souls beautiful. God does not love us because we are good. God does not love us because we make Him feel good, it's because we make Him happy! God loves us for our own sake! God loves us for who and what we are. God loves us, period!

What a tragedy it is, if a Christian going about his life while completely oblivious to all this! In our own times, we Catholics, wanting to be close to her always, offer her special presents in May: pilgrimages, visits to churches dedicated to her, little sacrifices in her honor, periods of study and well-finished work offered up to her, and a more attentive recitation of the rosary.

May 23, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

The Archbishop recently relaxed the mask and distancing rules in church for us. This is welcome news. At the same time it is causing some unwanted headaches. The key point here is this: how do you welcome both groups of people without causing division? I think the solution suggested by the Archbishop himself is best: to have the church divided into two sides: one side is for people who have been fully vaccinated and do not have to wear masks or observe distancing rules. The other side is for people who still need protection. The key here is charity: if we all put the welfare of the rest ahead of ours, then we can still worship God under one roof and remain one family, with no one treated as second class Catholics!

Please help me to welcome everyone back in church for Holy Mass!

May 30, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul in the process?" This is the question our Lord poses to us! The eternal destiny of our soul - how much does it weigh on the scale of things for us? What do we value most? What appeals most to us? What commands our dedication, our commitment, our unswerving loyalty? How does God come into the picture? How much weight does He have when we must weigh things according to their relevance to our life at this very moment? Would we exchange God and His promise for something else that seems to matter more to us now - our careers, our promotion, our ideology, our causes?

This past week, a young man made his First Holy Communion! This is the first time in his young life, something of such importance and significance happened - the Lord came to him with the gift of Himself! I am sure sensorily, this young child did not experience anything earthshaking, but deep down he understood in some profound way his life would not remain the same as before. From now on, his life would be divided into two phases, two parts, two moments: a "before" and an "after". I believe in some imperceptible way to him, his life has been changed for good. God is no longer an abstract entity. He is concrete, He is real; He is "consumable" even! This young child has now tasted God! From now on, every decision he will have made is boiled down to this: does this thing that I am about to do redound to the glory of God? Am I getting closer to God with this action? Am I about to put God ahead of this attractive creature?

The day of First Holy Communion is a day decided by God from all eternity for each one of us. That is the day when the possibility of heaven becomes real, for we can taste our destiny!

June 6, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

As one gets older, one is inclined to think more often about one's own departure from this world and about what one will leave behind. A dear older friend of mine, a great priest who shall remain anonymous, remarked to me poignantly recently, "I think after I am gone, there might be at most two people who would miss me: my own sister and a nun who used to keep house for me. They would miss me in a real deep way." Obviously this dear friend of mine did not think I would be the third one whose life would be affected by his absence from this world! Yes, I am already thinking about my legacy! I remember a quote from Cardinal George before he went to his eternal rewards, "The only thing a person takes with him to the grave is what he has given away." That is truly how I see my legacy should be built: to leave behind me as much as possible all the things I own in the hands of people who need them more than I do now. People give money to worthwhile institutions so that their names might be associated with a good cause, a movement, a lasting presence in the form of a building, an enduring influence through an endowment. Legacies are made into realities also through works of arts and literature, science projects. And these gestures towards future generations are truly laudable and necessary.

I am not asking you to let me help you build your legacies. I am utterly clueless on how to do such a thing. I am only asking you to help me preserve the legacy of those who were here before us at St. Agatha's - the legacy of their faith. I am asking you to help me to preserve this beautiful church made not only of stone and wood and glass, but primarily of sweat and tears and toil - the sweat and tears and toil of a small group of Christians more than one hundred years ago who settled in this corner of the city and whose hearts were filled with affection for God and who wanted their children to have the same for themselves, and to reach the same destiny. Perhaps our legacy is how we have shed tears and sweat and have toiled to preserve this magnificent testament of faith by those before us here at St. Agatha's!

The Reimers & Jolivette Company will start working on the church roof June 16. You have given us enough money for it. Please consider contributing to the Roof Fund for Phase II next year. Any money given over and beyond the cost shall go into the Preservation Fund so we can finish up the last part of the restoration project!

God bless you!

June 13, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Something I came across while preparing for homily from Father Julian Carron of Communion Liberation.

THE VACCINE AS PANACEA - Welcome vaccines! Who would not rejoice, after having seen so much suffering, fear, bewilderment and death? However, we cannot ignore what Susanna Tamaro wrote in a "Letter to Baby Jesus" published in the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera on December 22. "Forgive us for being convinced that the vaccine

will be our salvation, because the vaccine is a marvelous, indispensable help, as is the science at the service of humankind, but it will not be able to dispel the fog of our unhappiness. To do this, we will need a new gaze and a purified heart that will dialogue with it." These words uncover a question we cannot avoid. Is the vaccine enough for answering the questions reawakened by the pandemic? Is this all we need, the eradication of the disease?

And when there is no cure for a disease? A mother whose child suffers from a very grave syndrome wrote, "In this particularly wearying period my son was hospitalized in intensive care, sedated and intubated. In moments like this, I grab onto anything that makes me remember I am looked upon and loved, and so I call and message my friends, read and reread some things, seeking strength. In this pediatric ward the internet and telephone service are very poor and because of Covid restrictions I can't see anyone, so the things I usually cling to are unavailable. I remember having read a line, one of the many ones written in the newspapers, 'This past year should be left behind and forgotten. Let's look ahead; the hope of a vaccine is coming.' How can anybody think that hope lies entirely in the vaccine? I think of my son: is being healthy what gives us hope? If so, he would be a goner, and yet instead very often he is the one who testifies to me an immensely greater hope. Looking at him and looking at his body makes me conscious of the desire for good that each of us has, the desire to be happy and loved notwithstanding our defects, which are the drama that make us ask, that enable us to ask for and desire for more."

How can we respond to the abyss that has emerged, but was not caused, by the healthcare emergency? Even before that, what abyss are we talking about? It is the abyss of our own human needs, of the thirst for life we have within. It is also the abyss of the fear of death and pain, which has become more continual, of the anguish of losing life or that life will not be fulfilled definitively. Can the "answers" we have noted fill that abyss?

June 20, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Last week after the 8:30 Mass, someone asked me about a point I had not been explicit in my homily about Mother Teresa. He asked me, "So, what is faith?" That question has been haunting me ever since! I have been thinking I must somehow respond to his concern by answering it outright. And that means I must go straight to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. There, in article 1814 we find this: "Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because He is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God." For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "work(s) through charity."

For Mother Teresa, it is simply this: the complete trust in what God has promised, "I shall never leave you orphans. I shall come to you! I shall remain with you until the end of the world!" Because God has said it, it was enough for Mother Teresa to believe. It was enough for her to entrust the entire work of the new community into His care and not be worried about its success or failure. It was enough for her to ask the Pope for permission to leave her order and to start a brand new community to serve the poorest of the poor without a dime in her pocket. It was enough for her to go out into the streets of the slums of Calcutta every day and pick up the dying, one at a time, and bring them home to care

for them as if they had been Christ Himself - completely trusting that God would somehow provide all the food, the medicines, and the supplies needed. In other words, she entrusted her entire existence into God's hand!

If we at St. Agatha's would imitate Mother Teresa's faith, then we should be ok, too! If we would entrust the survival of this parish and the future of our school and the welfare of each family here into God's hand in the exact same way Mother Teresa did with her community, we would not have anything to be worried about! And it is rather simple: we do all we can, and at the end of the day, we cross ourselves and we look at the Crucifix and we say to Him, "Lord, I did what I could. But it's your church and I am sure you will take care of everything! Good night!"

June 27, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Today is the 27th anniversary of priestly ordination, and I want to share with you my Thanksgiving prayer I say every day to God for everything I have received from Him. This prayer I learned from the father of my priest mentor many, many years ago and it has kept me going through everything!

"O my God, I thank You for having called me out of nothing and formed me from dust and ashes into a human being! Thank You for sustaining me, guarding me every single day of my life! Thank You for having sent into the world Your dearly Beloved Son to become a man in order to suffer and to die for me! Thank You for having led me to Your Holy Church and bestowed on me and showered on me the graces from Your Precious Sacraments! Thank You for protecting me from all physical harm, for allowing me to live to see another day today, and for giving me another opportunity to repent of all my sins so that I may not lose my soul!

Therefore, I am now joining my voice to those of the Heavenly Court to praise you and to offer gratitude to You for everything I have received and am receiving and will be receiving from Your Bountiful Goodness! Amen! And if the graces of God so move you, please say a Memorare for me! God bless you!

July 4, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Please read the attached pastoral message from Archbishop Alexander Sample regarding the "General Dispensation" for Mass.

July 11, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

This morning I read in Crisis a wonderful story about St. Francis de Sales, the saintly bishop of Geneva in the 17th century. When he was a student at the University of Paris, the Sorbonne, he came under the influence of some persuasive Calvinist professors and he became convinced he had been destined to hell. For weeks this idea that he had been damned for all eternity through no fault of his own and that there was not a darn thing he could do about it to reverse his fate tormented him day and night. And yet, all the while, he resolved to remain faithful to God and to love Him and to serve Him - regardless of whether God would treat him differently for his devotion. One day he wandered into the Dominican church Saint-Étienne-des-Grès in Paris and was led to an image of our Lady.

He found the text of the Memorare ("Remember o Most gracious Virgin Mary . . ."), and he recited the whole prayer in one breath! Immediately all temptations to despair were lifted and he felt completely restored!

The Memorare is a powerful prayer! Couple that Memorare with the Hail Holy Queen and we have the most powerful weapon against the enemy! We shall be completely safe under the protective mantle of our Blessed Mother. For the last 16 months, many of us have been praying the Memorare and the Holy Queen for our parish and apparently we have been heard! There hasn't been a single case of COVID linked to Mass attendance at St. Agatha! That is no accident! You can be sure your priest will continue to pray these two prayers and the prayer to St. Joseph until the day he breathes his last breath - for himself and for his parishioners!

July 18, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

In view of the governor's decree to relax all COVID rules in churches and the Archbishop's decision to lift the dispensation for Sunday Mass obligation, I want to share with you a story from a homily by Pope Benedict many years ago. On a Sunday in the year 304 a group of Christians with their priest in the town of Abitene in present-day Tunisia were caught celebrating the forbidden Sunday Mass. They were brought before the governor of the province and he asked them why they were celebrating the Christian Sunday Eucharist in defiance of the emperor's orders, even though they knew it was a capital offence. "Sine dominico non possumus!" "Without what is the Lord's, without the Lord's Day, we cannot live!" That was their one and only answer - from the youngest to the oldest.

According to the Holy Father, the "dominico" means many things, but it means first and foremost the gift of the Lord, which is Himself. The gift of the Lord is the gift of the Risen One given to us by Himself, without whom we cannot remain ourselves. Every Christian must have access to Him, the Risen Savior, the One who has made Himself approachable and accessible, especially in the Holy Mass. Nothing complicated about this: Christians simply must have access to their Lord and Savior! Holy Mother Church makes it possible by inscribing it on a specific day of the week. And not just once a week on Sunday, the encounter with Christ is an event that is happening in our everyday life, in both our private and communal existence, in time and in space. The event of Christ gives our daily life a focus, a meaning, a foundation. From the beginning of the Church, Christians understood this need. Think about those Christians caught red-handed attending Sunday Mass by the Roman soldiers: for them the Sunday Mass was not merely a rule, but an "inner necessity." Without Him who sustains our lives, life itself is empty. "To do without this focus would deprive life of its very foundation, would take away its inner dignity and beauty." We are not different from those early Christians in Albitene who died for the Sunday Mass. We, too, need a relationship that sustains us, that gives direction and purpose and meaning to our lives. We too need access to the Risen Savior, "Who sustains us through and beyond death." We need this encounter which brings us together, which gives us space for freedom, which lets us see beyond the hustle-bustle of everyday life to God's creative love, from which we come and towards which we are travelling.

May we always desire to see Christ at the Holy Mass!

July 25, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

I have been celebrating the Old Latin Mass - the Extraordinary form - for the last 13 years. The one thing I can tell you with all sincerity: the Old Mass has taught me who it is that is truly the Priest! The Old Latin Mass has helped me to learn my place: I must decrease, and He must increase! This is so that Christ may be more visible as the One Who is doing the offering of the oblation. If anything, the Old Latin Mass has helped to be grateful to those who came before me; it has helped me to be grateful to the Church; and it has helped motivate me to remain a loyal son of the Church. More than anything else, it has taught me the infinite value of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Here below is what the Archbishop has to say about the latest development in the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the Vetus Ordo Missae. Please pray for all of us who have a deep attachment to the Old Mass! Fr. Luan Tran

Laudetur Iesus Christus!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, On July 16, 2021, Pope Francis issued Traditionis custodes, an apostolic letter given motu proprio establishing new disciplines regarding the use of the 1962 Missal of the Roman Rite. Throughout the motu proprio and in the letter accompanying it, the Holy Father highlights the right and duty of the diocesan bishop "to regulate the liturgical celebrations of his diocese" since he is the "moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole liturgical life of the particular Church entrusted to him" (Traditionis custodies art. 2). I want to assure the faithful of my intent to observe the canonical requirements of the motu proprio while supporting our priests and faithful in their desire to celebrate the sacraments according to the liturgical books of 1962. The careful implementation of the motu proprio will take study, consultation and time. I have great admiration for the devotion of the priests and lay faithful who have maintained the use of the Extraordinary Form in our local church. Therefore, I affirm that diocesan and religious priests in the Archdiocese who have offered Mass up until now according to the 1962 Missal may continue to do so with no changes at this time. Further guidance will be forthcoming regarding the prudent, charitable, and pastorally sound means of implementing the provisions of the motu proprio in the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon. With my assurances of prayers and every best wish, I remain, Yours sincerely in Christ, The Most Reverend Alexander King Sample, Archbishop of Portland in Oregon

August 1, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

I came across this news item this morning from Catholic Word Report by Mr. Ben Reinhard, ". . . Simone Biles's abrupt withdrawal from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Miss Biles, as most readers are probably aware, is widely regarded as the greatest gymnast of her generation (some would say, of all time) and was arguably the face of the US Olympic team entering the Games. After posting the highest individual score in the qualifying round, Miss Biles withdrew from competition after her first event in the women's team finals – shocking the world and leaving her teammates in an unenviable position. Lacking their most skilled gymnast and forced to compete in events for which they had not fully prepared, the remaining American gymnasts – heavily favored going into the games – finished a disappointing but respectable second. In a post-event press conference, Miss Biles revealed that she had withdrawn from the competition for the sake of her mental health – not, as initially supposed, because of injury."

I am not here to argue either for or against her decision. We can't really know why someone has decided to do something of that magnitude, ultimately. The only thing I know is this: each human being wants to be happy and this desire for happiness drives our strivings and our efforts. It might turn out that what we think should bring us happiness doesn't always, or at all. But still, we do everything because happiness is a good for which we have been created. For us, this means God. This Sunday's Gospel is about the ultimate happiness for which the human heart longs. Are we willing to sacrifice lesser things for it?

August 8, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Our Lord in the Gospel read last Sunday chided the Jews for their lack of faith, their utter worldliness, and their being totally oblivious to His salvific message. Having witnessed miracles upon miracles, they were still trapped in their old ways. Once the needs of the bellied had been satisfied, they went right back to the favorite topics of the day: politics and human intrigues! They were so completely caught up in worldly conversations and mundane concerns that they forgot to even pause for a moment to look up at the heavens and recognize their ultimate destiny! They had the Messiah in their midst, and yet they overlooked Him and misunderstood what He was all about. The words spoken by our Blessed Lord are still reverberating in my soul. Indeed, it is all too easy for me to be like the Jews clamoring for earthly food and earthly advantages while totally missing out on what counts in the eye of God.

That is why I am so glad I have discovered the story of Miss Simone Biles. Now, I have a fresh appreciation for what Fr. Carron had said many years ago:

Never before have you felt vibrate within you all of the desire for happiness that constitutes you, to the point of astonishing yourselves. Human nature, if you are merely weak and worthless, dust [and dirt] and shadow, why aspire so high?' said Leopardi, amazed. [In other words, if you and I were nothing but dust and ashes, why are our aspirations and longing so infinitely large?] The need of our heart is so great that at times we are bewildered. Nothing gives us peace. Nothing appears to be at the height of our desires. What tenderness we must have for ourselves in order not to abandon our hearts! Those who do not give up, sooner or later, will understand why it was worth it: to discover the fascination of Christ. . . .

Perhaps, this is how it happened: Simone Biles, at a moment in time, totally grasped the fact that nothing could truly match the height of the desires of her heart. And while backing out of the finals on the day before might be construed as quitting, she actually did the opposite: she refused to abandon what she considered most important – her soul! Already Simone understood what she had decided was the result of the affection she had for herself – which affection outweighs without question her desires for fame and money. This is the beginning of wisdom, because this affection for self is the sine-qua-non condition for affection for Christ, for God!

August 15, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Unfortunately, masks are, once again, making a comeback. Not by popular demand, but by government mandates. What can I say? Personally, I have been wearing a mask at

Mass during the Canon of the Mass for obvious health reasons. I am no longer worried too much about sneezing or coughing at the altar - either during or after the Consecrations of the Species thanks to the mask! Besides, I am no longer distracted thinking about how I would appear to my congregation during the most sacred moments of the Mass! I can just focus on the words of the Mass and the rubrics. And you, too, in the pews, are no longer distracted by my face! We can be all intentionally focused on the Most Holy Action at the altar!

Mask or no mask: may we all realize why we come to church on Sunday! A hassle and a discomfort that masking our face may be causing us should not derail our intention to feed our souls and to honor God. I leave you with a true story. In the spring of 2007, Bishop Barron was a scholar in residence at the North American College in Rome. During that period, he had the opportunity, on three occasions, to distribute communion at Mass in St. Peter's Square. This is how he told a beautiful story that happened on one of those occasions:

Standing on one side of a partition, I watched as scores of people came forward to receive the Eucharist. In the typically Italian style, things were a tad disorganized, and the faithful were compelled, in the press of the crowd, to stretch out their hands toward me. I saw all sorts of hands — old and young, dirty and clean, lined and unlined — reaching out for the bread of life. When I would move along the partition, some would cry out to me plaintively, “Padre, Padre, per favore (Father, Father, please).” Never before in my priesthood, though I had distributed communion to thousands, had I had the sense of carrying food to those who were desperate for it. Those faithful in St. Peter's Square embodied a truth that is deep in our Catholic tradition, though too infrequently stated: the Eucharist is not a luxury, but a necessity, for without it, we would, in the spiritual sense, starve to death.

August 22, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

In an Easter message many years ago, Pope Benedict XVI declared this: "It is a fact that if Christ had not risen, the 'emptiness' would be set to prevail. If we take away Christ and His resurrection, there is no escape for man, and every one of his hope remains an illusion." Now more than ever before, I feel as if there is no escape for man, for us, for me, for my family. Stories after stories of COVID breakthrough infections in people already vaccinated twice confirm my suspicion that no COVID vaccines could truly be our salvation. On top of this new wave of infections by the Delta variant, we have been bombarded by so many other bad news - here and around the world. It is no wonder that many people feel as if the waters have risen to their necks and that there is nothing that they could do to hold back the inexorable march of nihilism that is threatening to wipe everything away. In front of this new fear of nothingness that comes with the Delta virus, I keep going back to this one thing: only the Holy Mass that celebrates and makes present the definitive victory of Christ can give us hope - that hope that death will not emerge triumphant at the end. In the midst of the fifth wave of COVID surge, in front of the intense sufferings of the Haitians and the Lebanese and the Afghans and the people of other places, I hold firm to the faith in Christ's Resurrection. And the only way that I can hold firm in this faith is the Holy Mass I celebrate for us every day here at St. Agatha's. Yes, no vaccine could offer true salvation from nothingness. In the same way, no political

solutions could truly restore peace. But Christ and His Resurrection brings the newness of life to those who believe. That is why we cannot live without the Sunday Mass!

August 29, 2021: My dear Parishioners,

Have you ever wondered what happened to the people who walked away after Christ had given His discourse on the Holy Eucharist as recorded by St. John in chapter 6? What had happened to their admiration for Him when they witnessed with their own eyes the miracle of the loaves and the fishes just the day prior? And now, at this moment of decision, they let a few hard sayings of Christ become stumbling blocks for them. Granted, those sayings of our Lord were intolerable and utterly offensive to the ears of devout Jews, but they had followed Him this far and they had seen things beyond any worldly possibilities. But just like their forefathers who murmured against Moses in the desert, they murmured against Him now. And they left Him, one by one. Those fickle-hearted so-called disciples went back to their villages to continue living their wretched lives from before they had met Him. That day, little did they know that they would be on track to miss two of the greatest miracles our Lord ever did outside of the Resurrection – the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus! Had they stayed with Him in the company of Peter and the Apostles, their faith and their trust would have increased ten-fold or more with Christ's subsequent miraculous signs. They would have been privileged perhaps to witness the Resurrection and all the amazing things wrought by the Apostles as related in great details in the Acts of the Apostles. But because they turned their backs to the Lord, they turned away from the road that led straight to the central event of all human history. Instead of becoming partners with God in the work of universal redemption, they reverted to their former way of living - wretched, insignificant lives that they were! From that moment on, when confronted with sufferings, with betrayals, with tragedies, with losses, with disappointments, with physical needs, with illnesses, they had nowhere to turn. Their short-sighted, myopic reaction to a few hard sayings of our Lord eventually led them away from the source of all blessings, beatitudes, and happiness – Christ! Backsliders that they were, they also became dead-enders!

When people walk away from God with their backs turned towards Him, then no conversation with God is possible. It's truly a tragic situation. When I suffer something catastrophic, the true tragedy is not that I have lost something precious. The true tragedy is that I have lost something precious and I don't even care to blame God! For then God means nothing to me. God is dead to me. And when God is dead to me, there is nothing! When people could not even blame God for a bad thing that has happened to them, then there is no more light at the end of the tunnel. I think that is truly the tragedy for atheists and agnostics and nonbelievers alike: at the end of the day, they cannot even blame God when bad things happened to good people!

September 5, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

It is true that the Catholic Church is becoming more and more irrelevant in the life of modern man. The only thing that will save the Church from becoming totally irrelevant is the testimony of witnesses who have encountered Christ, who have met Christ – not just

on the pages of the Bible and theology books, but Christ Himself, witnesses who have received His strength from the Cross, who have been transformed into a new humanity themselves. Without such witnesses we have nothing, and nothing we try to do to evangelize will succeed.

Modern people have little patience and time for preachers and teachers and philosophers and professors and lecturers, but they do listen to witnesses. And should a preacher be listened to, it's because he is also a witness. That is exactly what Pope St. Paul VI said many years ago! God bless you!

September 12, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

Someone in the pew at the 5pm Mass last Saturday, wrote me a letter and indicated I had offended people by saying that sick people are abandoned when they are put in an institution. I must apologize most sincerely and wholeheartedly, for I should not have said that. It was, in the very least, insensitive and judgmental. The fact of the matter is, the decision to place a loved one in a memory care unit is an incredibly difficult one, but such a decision may be warranted for the good of the individual and the good of the rest of the family. It is indeed heart-breaking to have to put a loved one in an institution, but the truth is, it can be overwhelming to try to care for a sick loved one at home who suffers a debilitating illness. I should know. Some of you might have heard me telling the story of my father and his dementia some time ago. So, I hereby offer my abject apology to anyone in the pews who might have been offended by my remarks. One more thing, doctors and nurses are among the most dedicated people I know and I truly appreciate their hard work and care.

My main point last week about the sick was simply this: sickness born in faith can be truly salvific and redemptive. And the sick person who carries the cross of sickness is Christ to others. We can decide to let sickness embitter us, or we can look at sickness as an occasion of grace - because Christ our Lord loves the sick and cares for them personally!

September 29, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

This evening I am thinking of asking you to join me on a new adventure - a crusade! No, we are not marching off to some far-off land to fight a battle for God. Instead, I want to invite you to join me on a Rosary Crusade when October rolls around (October is the month of the Holy Rosary!). It's not about fighting a battle to take back something or to fend off some foes. It's about storming heaven with prayers using the Holy Rosary as our instrument to fight for the survival of our parish and school! You see, we have been caught in this pandemic for almost two years, and now the restrictions are weighing on us like fetters and shackles, and they are dragging us down! I had been wanting to restart coffee and donuts, but I couldn't. I had been wanting to begin potluck once a month after the first Saturday Vigil Mass of the month, but I couldn't! I had been wanting to start a film club to stir up interests in faith and culture, but I couldn't! What's more, we don't have the resources to invite guest preachers for missions, for retreats, for talks. We don't have money to start up new programs, to try different approaches toward evangelization. The needs of this parish and school are numerous, and the resources we have been given are limited.

What can we do? Ultimately, it's not about what we can do to save ourselves, but it's about whom we trust to help us. While we lack many things that other parishes have, one thing we do not lack: devotion and love of God! What I am trying to say is, why shouldn't we return to the tried-and-true method of the past - PRAYERS? Why shouldn't we start a Rosary Crusade! Why shouldn't we storm heaven with our prayers through this ancient form of devotion so that our parish and our school may survive these terrible times? For a while now, Emma Bosco and her group have been practicing the devotion of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. And I just joined them recently, and it was very uplifting and reassuring! We don't need to start a program and we certainly don't need to reinvent the wheel. When times are tough, we follow the saints of the past: we pray! And I would like each family of the parish to begin to pray the Rosary beginning in October. Won't you join me?

October 3, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

The Rosary is a repetitive vocal prayer that has been around many centuries. Many Catholics learned the Rosary at their mother's knee. Some no longer practice this devotion, some have continued praying it well into their adulthood. The truth is, the Rosary is one of those prayers that goes with any kind of personality. The saints love the Rosary. And the Blessed Mother loves the Rosary! I came across a reflection on the Rosary in Magnificat this month by a Dominican nun and I want to share it with you:

There are times in all our lives when, faced with pain or sorrow, our very thoughts seem to stop; in such paralyzing moments the only prayers that will come to our lips are those we have said since childhood: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be. It is a natural thing that a grief stricken child should call upon its mother for help; so it is that we grope for our rosary in the darkness of tragedy or temptation. And our Lady does not fail to help; she is a careful mother. Paradoxically, though the rosary is limited to so few prayers said vocally, its possibilities for mental prayer have almost no limit at all. The greatest of mystics and scholars have lost themselves in the depths of the mysteries presented by these scenes of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer. The wings for soaring are to be found in any of the mysteries. In the measure in which we can detach ourselves from earth, poor mortals that we are, we are allowed to fly to God. —Sister Mary Jean Dorcy. O.P.

October 17, 2021: My Dear Parishioners,

On May 13th, 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal, with an urgent message for the world. She would appear five more times, on the thirteenth day of each month, with the final apparition taking place in October. In this series of apparitions, Mary identified herself as "Our Lady of the Rosary." She urged the three children to pray the Rosary every day for peace in the world (World War I was raging at the time) and to make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. Over the course of these visits—and the preceding visits, in which an angel prepared the children for her coming—there were five prayers taught to Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta. The two prayers we should pray every day are these two below.

The Pardon Prayer - The angel who appeared to the children called himself “the Angel of Peace” and “the Angel of Portugal.” He taught them the following prayer:

My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love Thee! I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love Thee.

The Angel’s Prayer- On one occasion, the three children saw the angel prostrate himself before a host and chalice that hung in the air. Worshipping the Eucharist, the angel prayed: Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifferences whereby He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of Thee the conversion of poor sinners.

(From the Blog "Good Catholic" by *the Catholic Company*)

October 24, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

A week ago this past Friday, we buried a very dear parishioner who died after a long struggle with various illnesses. She had been a part of our common life here at St. Agatha’s, a fixture at daily Mass, and a faithful adorer of the chapel. This devout Catholic lady taught me the most important lesson in my life as a Christian and a priest: to learn what it means to fully trust in God when every external evidence points in the other direction, when everything opposes the promise of faith. She had been ill when I arrived here, and despite all the efforts of her doctors’ and her prayers and our prayers, she was relentlessly barraged with one problem after another, one complication after another. There was no break, no letup, and no respite for her. There were days when I just sat in my office and thought about her struggles, having received some discouraging news about her health: “How could it be possible for this devout Catholic, this firm believer in the power of prayers, the power of the Rosary and the Divine Mercy, to be constantly fighting for her life and not abandoning her faith?” And I wanted to cry out, “Please God, don’t just string her along! Please show her Your face! Give her some signs!” Little by little I began to reckon how she kept her head above the water. I think this is how she must be praying in her heart, “Lord, I don’t understand why this tremendous suffering, but your grace is sufficient for me, and I will carry this cross for you, just as you carried your cross for me.” Little by little, she taught me the lesson of trust. In front of every setback and every defeat, she would look inwards searching for the will of God, remembering His past kindnesses to her, and recalling His never-failing mercy. Even before the initial disappointment could wear off having been told of a setback, she had already clutched her rosary and resumed another round of prayers. And somehow, she rediscovered newfound hope which then enabled her to live to fight another day. Remarkably, she looked on very little relief, every little respite, every little break she received – be it a much-needed transfusion, or an improved lab report – as a gift and a sign from God and the Blessed Mother and her favorite saints. Instead of letting her illnesses crush her spirit, she looked for victory and miracle wherever possible. And there were victories and miracles everywhere! I imagine a survivor in a shipwreck - bobbing up and down on the surface of an immense ocean that threatened to engulf her at any moment, holding on to

nothing and yet attached to a piece of wood from the sunken ship! That's how! She never lost confidence in God, because she knew she was attached to the one thing that could keep her afloat: the wood of the cross. And somehow that was enough to keep her from being swallowed up by the seething abyss underneath. This lady taught me how to turn suffering into purpose of living, darkness into light, and defeat into victory – not by her sheer strength of will, but by clinging to faith and God's promise. Thus, faith begets more faith, trust begets more trust, and confidence more confidence!

My dear parishioner died two weeks ago, and her funeral was 9 days ago – on Friday. People who didn't know her would say she had succumbed to her illness. But I and the parishioners here see it differently: God took her at the end of the journey – a journey God had determined in advance to educate her by suffering just like her Lord and Savior did, a journey at the end of which she shares in His victory. Let me conclude with 1 Peter 7, the one sentence that sums up the life of this faithful Christian: “. . . though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than fire-tried gold, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

October 31, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

All Souls is coming and it reminds us of the faithful deceased with a great prayer that embraces them all in our thoughts and in our memories. Our prayer must turn to the Lord so that He may welcome into His kingdom of eternal joy and peace, those who have left this world and passed into eternity, our relatives, friends, acquaintances, and the dead of all times that we do not know, but God knows.

The prayer is for the holy souls in purgatory, especially the most abandoned and of whom we even do not know the name and the existence: the dead of all the wars and all the violence, the dead of the past and of today, the dead on the road, at sea, in hospitals, in homes, in small and large cities, the ones who died because of shipwreck or train wreck or plane crash or epidemics and of course those who in recent days have left our hearts deeply saddened. We commemorate all the dead, without excluding anyone. Let's raise for every one of them a prayer so that the Lord may grant them eternal rest and perfect peace.

If it is natural that our memory goes today in particular to our deceased loved ones, whom we have entrusted to the love and eternity of the Lord. From our family members who are now gone – our parents and grandparents, from our siblings, from our uncles and aunts – we learn about the eternal love of God, which and which alone keeps alive those whom He loves, after having welcomed them with His forgiveness. Our deceased loved ones remind us that it is not worth it to waste time and effort to ambitions and ephemeral things because everything passes and only love remains. St. Benedict in his rules insists that his monks keep death before their eyes every day, for even might forget that they will die someday. Our beloved dead remind us that someday we will follow them into the other world. There is nothing that strike like the death of our parents, the ones who gave us life. On All Souls Day, we remember our beloved dead with the greatest affection for them, and I for one recognize that I have often neglected to think about them. We are

simply too busy, too deeply immersed in the passing things of the world, too involved in things that do not last. On this one day of the year, we take time to think about where we are headed, where we have come from, and by whom and for whom we have been made. (Thoughts expressed might have been gathered from various places!)

November 7, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

Masses I stood at the pulpit and presented to the people who were there with this request: to help the church raise \$50,000 for the second half of the roof replacement. I hope you know that asking for money from you is the last thing any priest would like to do, but I had no choice! We have survived the pandemic thanks to God's grace and your generosity. And now that we have finished the first phase of the roof project, which cost us \$46,000, I felt it was my duty to come before for help to finish this endeavor. As I said in my announcement, the parish has no means of generating income other than the Sunday collection, so I must overcome my hesitancy and explain to you the need for your financial support. When you make your contributions to the roof fund, please write it on the envelope or the check. We will keep you posted on the progress. Any extra will go toward the resealing of the outside walls to preserve what has been restored over the years. The main focus for us here is to preserve the physical edifice of the church so we can always have a sanctuary in which to worship God (our spiritual home on this side of heaven!)

We have stayed together for twenty-one months since the pandemic. You could have left the church. You could have bailed out of the sinking ship. You could have moved on to greener pastures. You could have quit our company forever and no one could say a thing. Instead, you have stayed with me throughout these most difficult times, and I am so grateful to you beyond words. Our parish family has shrunk in size, but your generosity and your fidelity and your commitment and your faithfulness have more than made up for the shrinkage! A smaller flock but with a stronger sense of belonging, and walking with the pastor under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and always remaining faithful to our baptismal call to serve God in the Catholic Church here in this little corner we call Sellwood: this is what we are! This little flock has weathered many storms and shall continue to do so - if we stay together and remain faithful to each other in God's graces.

November 14, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

I think it's high time to open up the parish for some community-building events. We had had several plans in the work during the spring this year, but all were quashed with the unexpected arrival of the Delta strand of the Corona virus. Now, I think we should at least resume coffee and donuts at least once a month after Christmas. We will start this off with the event on Sunday, December 12, the Third Sunday of Advent, which happens to be the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe. If all goes well, the Portland Mariachi Band will be here at the 10:30 Mass to play music for the Mass and also to serenade the Blessed Mother under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe! The band was here before and they were fantastic! We also use this occasion to invite school families to return to Mass with us, so that we could re-institute the Sunday with School Families on the first Sunday of every month! By the way, if you feel inclined, please help us to defray the cost of engaging

the Portland Mariachi Band! Your financial support for this worthy endeavor will be greatly appreciated! They are great musicians and we are honored to have them here with us. Deacon Pashley will restart our Conversion Class on the First Sunday of Advent after the 10:30 Mass in the St. Francis Room. We have two excellent candidates for Conversion and they have been attending Sunday Mass here for the last several months. One is Kevin from China and the other is Jordan from around here! If any of you feel you can use a refresher course on the Faith, please feel free to join them and Deacon Pashley at the class! There will be coffee for you there while you ponder higher things!

I am asking if there would be several families or individuals who could help me with coffee and donuts on Sundays! Please talk to me after Mass. Right now, we are just looking at one coffee event after the 8:30 Mass on the First Sunday. The amount of people who volunteer will determine how often we should offer this. I have been having a hard time finding volunteers. We will follow the rules for distancing in the hall used by our school staff. Please consider! That will be all for now! God Bless you!

November 21, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

A most Blessed Thanksgiving to you all! Thank you for sustaining the parish with your prayers, your presence, your participation, and your financial support! Viva Cristo Rey! Long Live Christ the King!

November 28, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

With Sunday we are entering the liturgical season of Advent. In the First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul invites us to prepare for "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ", with God's grace keeping ourselves blameless. The exact word Paul uses is "coming", in Latin *adventus*, from which the term "Advent" derives.

Let us reflect briefly on the meaning of this word, which can be rendered with "presence", "arrival" or "coming". In the language of the ancient world it was a technical term used to indicate the arrival of an official or the visit of the king or emperor to a province. However, it could also mean the coming of the divinity that emerges from hiddenness to manifest himself forcefully, or that divine presence celebrated in worship. For Christians: Jesus is the King who entered this poor "province" of earth to pay everyone a visit. When we celebrate Advent, we celebrate the fact that God is here, he has not withdrawn from the world, he has not deserted us. Even if we cannot see and touch him as we can tangible realities, he is here and comes to visit us in many ways.

The meaning of the expression "advent" therefore includes that of *visitatio*, which simply and specifically means "visit" - a visit from God: he enters my life and wishes to speak to me. In our daily lives we all experience having little time for the Lord and also little time for ourselves. We end up being absorbed in "doing". We become absorbed in entertainment and in various kinds of amusement. At times we get carried away. Advent, this powerful liturgical season that we are beginning, invites us to pause in silence to perceive a presence. Pope Benedict sees in this season of Advent an invitation to pause and to look at the big picture, the bigger perspective, and to understand that the individual events of the day are hints that God is giving us, signs of the attention he has for each one of us – His calling card! Advent reawakens in us the desire to contemplate the Lord

present, so that we may achieve the certainty of his presence, a certainty without which hope would become impossible.

(PS: this bulletin article might contain ideas from Pope Benedict and others!)

December 5, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday is already the Second Sunday of Advent. Time is passing by rather quickly. Let us seize the day and not waste any more time! Let us make every minute count, so that we don't feel unprepared when Christmas finally arrives in just a few weeks! Father Waddill is coming for confession between 8:15 and 11am on the 12th of December, next Sunday. Please feel free to get up during Mass to go to Father in the confessional at the front of the church for this wonderful opportunity to prepare yourselves for Christmas. He is a great confessor and he travels a long way to come to help you with this most wonderful Sacrament!

On the 12th of December we also commemorate the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe in conjunction with the Third Sunday of Advent with the Portland Mariachi Band! I think it will be a most joyous occasion for all of us!

And one more thing: Communion Liberation in Portland is hosting an Advent retreat at our church on this same Sunday at noon. I will be the one giving the lesson. You are welcome to join us. Please let Karen know if you would like to attend.

Please make the most of this Advent Season! God bless you!

December 12, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

Now, a true story to flesh out the truth of Advent, the truth of the God-who-always-comes, the truth of the God who stays involved with our lives – even when we ourselves have given up on ourselves! In the spring of 1908, an Irish priest was walking through the slums of Great Yarmouth, a seaside town in Norfolk in the east of England. The priest was the great Jesuit Fr. Willie Doyle, a heroic chaplain in the Royal Navy in WWI who was killed when he was trying to retrieve a wounded soldier in No Man's Land in 1917. But that was later. On that beautiful spring day in Yarmouth in 1908, he was making his way across the slums when he stumbled upon a very old woman, "over ninety" as he wrote in a letter home. They got talking and she mentioned that she had not been to church for many years. But there was something about the priest that touched her heart profoundly. "I have led a wicked life," she proceeded to tell him, "but every day I begged God to send me a good friend before I died, and I feel now my prayer is heard."

"The next day," Fr. Doyle wrote, "I came back and heard her confession and brought her Holy Communion on Easter Sunday. And she cried like she had never cried before. As the tears streamed down her old withered face, she said, 'Oh, Father this is the first happy day of my life, for I have never known what happiness is since I was a child.'"

This is exactly what Advent means for me and for you: God is always and relentlessly coming for His children until the last stray sheep has been brought home, until every human heart that longs for Him has found Him! If every hair on my head has been counted, and if not even a single swallow shall fall to the ground without His knowledge, then the God-who-is-always-coming, knows all the secret passages of the human heart. He knows exactly how and when and where and with what - to come and touch my heart

and to wake me up from my despondency, my loneliness, at the precise moment when I am most open to receive Him. And He shall rekindle in my soul the joy of belonging to Him again.

Nothing would get through to that old woman who had abandoned the faith for many years – nothing, except someone whom she could identify as “a good friend.” So, for her with all her sins and her stubbornness and her resistance and her recalcitrant way, what would God do? He would send a holy priest from Ireland all the way to the other side of the British Isles, to that precise slum, at that precise moment. God understands us better than we understand ourselves. God knows the secret desires of our hearts, our vulnerabilities, our wounds. And He appeals to us through them, not to manipulate us but to offer us an opportunity to respond to Him and have Him as our companion for our journey. *(I relied on sources on the internet for the story!)*

December 19, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

This is the last Sunday of Advent. The season of awaiting is almost over! And yet, it is never over! For we have been made to await something always! Please consider what Pope Benedict wrote many years ago:

"Expectation or waiting is a dimension that flows through our whole personal, family and social existence. Expectation is present in thousands of situations, from the smallest and most banal to the most important that involve us completely and in our depths. Among these, let us think of waiting for a child, on the part of a husband and wife; of waiting for a relative or friend who is coming from far away to visit us; let us think, for a young person, of waiting to know his results in a crucially important examination or of the outcome of a job interview; in emotional relationships, of waiting to meet the beloved, of waiting for the answer to a letter, or for the acceptance of forgiveness . . . One could say that man is alive as long as he waits, as long as hope is alive in his heart. And from his expectations man recognizes himself: our moral and spiritual 'stature' can be measured by what we wait for, by what we hope for."

We always await the coming of God! And thus, the heart is always longing for something outside of this world, something this world does not and cannot contain! May we never let the distractions of this life make us forget our expectant waiting for God!

December 26, 2021: Dear Parishioners,

In the minds of many, the Christian God has been vanquished for good by the tiny COVID virus. No one who has observed what has been going on for the last twenty months should still remain Christian. Isn't it logical to conclude that, if God had been real, He would have done away with the pandemic months ago and saved the world from these nasty bugs? As it is, even priests and bishops have been dropping like flies. And as it is, God has failed miserably - seemingly.

But one hundred and six years ago tonight, on Christmas Eve 1914, an incredible event took place on the Western Front in France during WWI. After an all-night snowfall that covered the battlefield with a serene white powder, unusual lights began to appear all across the German lines. The British camp didn't know what to make of it and thought

the Germans were preparing for an attack. Instead of the sound of artillery fire however, the sound of singing made its way across no man's land - the stretch of land between the enemy trenches. To their amazement, the German soldiers were singing the tune of a well-known Christmas song – “Stille Nacht” (“Silent Night”). The British soldiers, not to be undone, responded with their own Christmas carols. A mutual curiosity and respect came across the soldiers at both camps and they began to applaud each other's singing. Being caught up in the joy of the moment, a German officer appeared and walked out to the middle of no man's land and a British officer went out to meet him amidst cheering from both camps. When they finally met, they formally saluted each other and shook hands. It was unheard of in all the annals of military history.

The improvised Christmas truce presented a chance for both camps to bury their dead. According to some accounts, after most were buried, the soldiers from both sides gathered to honor their fallen comrades and read from the Bible – the 23rd Psalm. In the horror of the trenches of the Western Front, the power of this holy night worked its grace. The secular world has no use for Christmas, because for them Santa Claus is a myth, God is a fantasy (COVID is the proof of that!), and religion is truly the opiate of the masses. And so, nowadays, a truce like the truce of 1914 is unthinkable. But we Christians know that we are not dealing with hocus-pocus, with superstitions, with phony good cheer, with spiritual opiates. No, on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day, with masks on our faces, we still present ourselves in Church to celebrate Christmas. For we know Christmas allows us to touch again, to encounter anew, to experience once more, the greatest event in the history of the world: the mystery of Word-Made-Flesh, God-coming-among-us, Emmanuel, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Sources for the story were gathered from the internet)