

Fr. Luan Tran
Weekly Bulletin Notes
2022

January 2, 2022: Dear Parishioners,

As we prepare to enter the new year of 2022, let us reflect on Pope St. John Paul II's celebration of the new millennium. For Pope John Paul, the marking of 2,000 years from the birth of Christ is a significant milestone in the life of the Church. It is also a time for Christians to rediscover their vocation in the world. The document, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, based on the Incarnation, provides a profound insight into the Christian understanding of time, and the way we mark time in our own lives: "With regard to its content, this Great Jubilee will be, in a certain sense, like any other. But at the same time it will be different, greater than any other. For the Church respects the measurements of time: hours, days, years, centuries. She thus goes forward with every individual, helping everyone to realize how each of these measurements of time is imbued with the presence of God and with his saving activity."

May God bless us with His presence this New Year 2022 and may nothing deter us on the way of witnessing Christ's love in the world!

January 9, 2022: Dear Parishioners,

The Epiphany is still with us! In fact, every day is another Epiphany for us to discover God in our life all over again! The Magi were blessed men who pursued the Star with utmost determination. They finally arrived at the Manger and were able to find the Object of their search and the Object of their hearts. The question is: what is the reason why some men see and find, while others do not? What opens the eyes and the heart? What is lacking or missing in those who remain indifferent in front of this mystery?

I tell you, too much self-confidence, too much smugness, too much self-assurance! That is how Pope Benedict saw it. People who dismiss Christmas and who make a mockery of Santa Claus and disregard the Magi and who laugh at people who cry watching *It's A Wonderful Life!*, they claim to know reality and they have made a definitive judgment on everything. Their hearts are closed, and they remain unmoved before the newness of God. No miracle is possible because it contravenes the law of physics. For they are certain how the universe operates and can't be bothered by a God who wants to meet them. They place their confidence in themselves rather than in Him, and they do not think it possible that God could be so great as to make himself small so as to come really close to us. One more thing, what they lack is authentic humility, which is able to submit to what is greater. They don't have the imagination to believe that what is truly great can exist in what is truly small - a helpless Baby. They lack the "evangelical capacity" to be a child at heart in order to feel wonder.

January 16, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

The ceiling of the church has a problem that we just discovered thanks to the alert parishioner. One of the trusses supporting the roof has a crack. We don't know what this means for us financially, but it has to be fixed. I would be extremely grateful for any help from you! We have raised sufficient funds for the roof and the resealing of the two critical outside walls, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart! Now we shift our focus on strengthening the structure that supports the roof! I want to share with you an amazing story I came across on the CNA website last week! Hopefully this would give us the right perspective.

The wildfire that tore through Boulder County on December 29 took a tremendous toll. By the time it was contained, it had devastated 6,000 acres and destroyed 1,000 homes. The disastrous fire has upended the lives of hundreds in the towns of Marshall and Superior, but through the doom and gloom of this tragic event right in the middle of the Holy Season of Christmas, an unexpected sign of hope has arisen in the midst of the ruins. A statue of the Blessed Mother survived the inferno practically unscathed. One thousand homes were destroyed, but a humble garden statue of our Lady was saved! It was covered with soot but suffered no damage and you can see it on social media. Mary is posed with her head bowed and her arms outstretched towards the ground, almost as if she is gesturing to the rubble around her. In the uncanny stillness of the charred landscape, the statue of the Blessed Mother poses a striking testament of God's presence in the same way the steel beam Cross remained at Ground Zero on September 11!

The statue of Mary is located on the property of Tom and Kat Greany, who lost nearly everything they owned to the Marshall fire. Previously, the family had been displaced and forced to look for a new dream home. Just when they had finished renovating and were about to enjoy life, the fire swept through and took everything with it. And yet, through all this hardship, however, Tom refuses to lament what's lost. Instead, he is taking the time to reflect on all that he has. At precisely a time when his family's day-to-day life has been completely upended, you would expect him to be embittered and resentful by God's seemingly heartless inaction. You would think for a devout Catholic, he and his wife should have the right to demand from God an answer, "Where were You on that Thursday Morning when the fire was racing across our town? Why were You missing in action?" But on the contrary, he said this, "Seeing this when we returned was shocking, horrifying. Awareness of the loss stings mightily. But we can only feel the loss as pain because of the extra-ordinary magnitude of the gifts we had been given in our lives. How richly blessed are we!"

The Greany's never expected the fire to take their house. They lived in the middle of a manicured suburban neighborhood, with scarcely any trees to catch on fire. On that fateful morning, they evacuated with only a few essential items, and they did not even take a bag of clothes. That is why the sorrow when they returned was all the more poignant. Tom describes an unrecognizable hellscape of distorted structure and combusted comforts: "Twisted steel I-beams, disconnected from the foundation, had fallen onto the ash. On our front porch we could see the crumbled concrete of the foundation, bricks strewn about. And the beautiful designer front doors themselves melted into a twisted ball. But Mary remained. Covered by black soot on the right half of the statue's body, she was unscathed."

There you have it, the story of a modern day Job, who refuses to curse God and die! Like the old man, Tom and his wife did not take it out on God. Instead, they say with Job, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away! Blessed be the Lord God!" Instead, they expressed their gratitude that no one was harmed in the fire and that they remain

together. Most of all they are grateful for their Catholic faith. One last quote from the husband: "I had asked for only one thing for Christmas. That the Lord would make my family holy. Maybe that starts with stripping away our possessions and becoming fully reliant on him. In front of this unspeakable loss, they remember God's blessing. Instead of wallowing in ashes and dust and lamenting and mourning the loss of material possession, they cling to the one thing that remains – the statue of our Blessed Mother! God bless you!

January 23, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI asks a surprising question. He asks "What did Jesus actually bring?" It's a reasonable question. We still have wars. We still have famine. People still suffer.

People still get sick and die. So what did Jesus actually bring? And Pope Benedict answers it this way: "Jesus brought us God. Jesus brings us God."

Jesus brings us God, because He is God made visible for us. Jesus brings us God so that He can set us free and be truly alive. Jesus brings us God so that we can share in God's own life, so that the hope of eternal life can begin to shape our destiny – now. Jesus brings us so much more than just a few occasional miracles, a teaching here and there, a philosophy, an outlook on life. Jesus is the Savior! The gospel today brings this out with absolute clarity. Jesus says that he has been anointed to "proclaim liberty to captives and to let the oppressed go free." In the Bible, anointing meant that you were chosen and given a special power by God. So Jesus is the Savior who comes to set us free. He comes to bring us back to God. He came, because we can't save ourselves. May we truly grasp the mission of our Divine Savior!

January 30, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

Jesus brings us God! That is what Pope Benedict has always insisted. And He gives us the strength and the calling to make the world a better place. He didn't come to solve all the world's problems, He gives us God so that we can succeed in making our world more human, more godly. That is how the world is changed. The world is messed up royally, but the world can be converted – one soul at a time - through the power of God brought into the world by our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Beginning with myself, today I shall integrate this truth that Christ is truly my Savior and the Savior of the world, that He is truly powerful, that I should entrust everything into His hands, with this special prayer from St. Faustina, the apostle of Divine Mercy. It's simple: "Jesus, I trust in You!" Just 5 words within one inhale and one exhale and the rhythm of my day is changed! "Jesus, I trust in You!" Beginning with myself today, I shall make it an integral part of my life. In the car, in the elevator, or while waiting in line in the store I can say those words, over and over again: "Jesus, I trust in You!" When I am frustrated or filled with doubt, "Jesus, I trust in You!" When I am weighed down by my own sins or the sins of others, "Jesus, I trust in You!" When my problems multiply and become intractable, "Jesus, I trust in You!" And I tell you, He has never disappointed me. This is how Christ gives us the power to truly be liberated from fear, from anxieties, from nervousness about the future. When we say this prayer, we are saying no to all forms of idolatry, to the worship of money, and to the reliance on ourselves. We are saying no to

everything made by human hands, and we acknowledge the Lord as the true source of life and happiness. There is simply no other alternative.

February 20, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

The Church who is our Mother through her liturgy and her saints ever reminds us that Christ's victory over sin and death alone can give us victory in our struggles. She reminds us that those poor and hungry and weeping and insulted and spat upon and persecuted people on account of the Son are never to be forgotten by Almighty God - heaven is waiting for them. Holy Mother Church reminds us that, ultimately, we are destined for something larger than this life can provide!

My father died on the feast of St. Blaise more than two weeks ago. His funeral was on the Friday before last. My mother is inconsolable. They had been married for 62 years. They had been through hell and back together. The war, the labor camp, me being gone from home at 17 to escape communism. And now he is dead – less than two days after the doctors had diagnosed him with aspirated pneumonia. My mother can't stop sobbing. What should I tell my mother to ease her sorrow? "Mom, don't be so sad! Dad didn't suffer much when he died!" But, of course, I didn't say that, for I knew that would have been a stupid thing to say to someone like my mother! Because she would then have looked at me strangely and she would have given me a good scolding, "You are a priest and you say that! Did our Lord die without pain? Did He not suffer so on the cross?" So, I didn't say that. The only thing that seemed to help was the fact that my father did receive all the Last Rites of the Catholic Church. Don't take me wrong, I am all for pain control, being a coward myself. But at the end of life, even the best pain control regime can't eliminate all pain. And for Catholics, more than anything else is the grace to die a good death - to die with the Last Sacraments of the Church. This I was able to offer to my father. So now there is hope for him. Now there is hope that our family can be together again in God's time! Where would our family be without the hope of Resurrection, without Jesus risen and glorious? Where would yours be?

Let me leave you with a quote from Malcolm Muggeridge. When he was asked about the possibility that God might not exist, he answered: "I'd rather be wrong with Dante and Shakespeare and Milton, with Augustine of Hippo and Francis of Assisi, with Dr. Johnson, Blake, and Dostoevsky, than be right with Voltaire, Darwin, the Huxleys, Herbert Spencer, H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw!"

Yes, I, too, would rather take my chances with G. K. Chesterton, with C.S. Lewis, with Mother Teresa, with Pope John Paul II, with Archbishop Romero, with the 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians executed by ISIS in Libya in 2015, than to be right with Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Mao-Tse-Tung – God or no God!

February 27, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

In 1983 a movie came out called "The Scarlet and the Black." It starred Gregory Peck and Christopher Plummer. The movie is based on a true story. It told the story of Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, an Irish priest who was working in the Vatican when Rome was occupied by Nazi troops during World War II. This monsignor organized a secret underground network to hide and protect allied soldiers who had been shot down and Jews who were being persecuted. The drama of the story consists mainly of the ongoing

battle of wits between Monsignor O'Flaherty and the German Commander of the occupied city, Colonel Herbert Kappler. The Vatican Monsignor outsmarts the Germans just long enough to save thousands of lives, but many others are lost. When the allied forces reached the outskirts of the city and the Germans were surrounded, Colonel Kappler arranged a secret meeting with Monsignor O'Flaherty. He asked – no, he demanded - the Monsignor to use his underground network to take the Colonel's wife and children to safety in Switzerland. The Monsignor was absolutely incredulous; he was flabbergasted that this wicked criminal would have the nerve to ask for such a favor. He cursed him for his evil ways and walked off into the night – filled with wrath and fury. The last words he spoke, if memory serves are these: “I cannot believe after what you had done you want mercy! . . . Now you demand that your family be saved! I see you in hell first!” Only later, when the Colonel was captured and under interrogation by the allies did he discover that the Monsignor did save his family. While the German colonel was under arrest in Rome for the remainder of the war, Msgr. O'Flaherty visited him regularly. Eventually, Colonel Kappler repented and was received into the Church.

You see, Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty was a man of passion – passion for life, for justice, for decency, for truth. As such, his sense of justice was deeply violated when this evil man, Col. Kappler, pleaded for mercy for his family. He had witnessed first-hand how Kappler butchered his friends and associates. He himself had been subjected to countless attempts on his life by Col. Kappler. No wonder he lashed out against the audacity of this evil, wicked man, who knew that his days were numbered and so resorted to manipulation to achieve one last thing. No wonder the good Monsignor categorically refused this unconscionable request, this diabolical claim to his goodness as a priest from a man who had sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver. And yet, ultimately, he saw clearly how his entire priesthood and his work on behalf of the Church would be counted for nothing, unless he would agree to save the lives of the wife and the children of his sworn enemy, because that would be exactly he would truly live out what his Master and Lord had demanded of him. Because what was required of him was to love his enemies and to do good to those who hate him. For in the end, Msgr. O'Flaherty knew: God never gives up on us, because He knows that He can save us, change us, and lead us closer to him. And He in turns wants us to never give up on anybody – including our mortal enemies.

March 6, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

Below is something I came across from Zenit many years ago and it is fitting for us to consider this First Sunday in Lent!

"In these forty days, the Church asks us to live with intense prayer, with sincere penitence in contrition and with generous almsgiving that means that compassion towards the poor is not only an emotion but a sharing of goods. The works of Lent that the Church asks us to do are three: prayer, penance, and almsgiving. Today, [the focus] is on penance to help us arrive at the celebration of the great mystery of the Easter of his Son, purified and completely renewed in mind and spirit.

Penance has two essential elements: the contrition of the heart and the mortification of the body. It should not be forgotten that, if it is the heart of man that wants evil, it is often the body that has helped him to commit it. The principle of true penance lies in the heart: we learn it from the Gospel in the examples of the prodigal son, the sinner who washes the feet of Christ with her tears, Zacchaeus the publican and St. Peter, who offered his pain to Christ and whom He confirmed in his love. During Lent, the Christian must

practice penitence of the heart and consider it as the essential foundation of all the acts pertinent to this holy time. However, penance would always be illusory if it did not add the body's tribute to the internal feelings it inspires.

The Savior is not satisfied with moaning and weeping over our sins. He expiates them with the suffering of his body. The Church, Christ's Interpreter, admonishes us that the penitence of our heart will not be accepted if we do not unite it with the observance of abstinence on Ash Wednesday and on Lenten Friday, and with fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The devil tempts starting from sensuality and gluttony, and that is why during Lent we are asked to practice not only prayer but abstinence and fasting."

March 13, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

There is a beautiful and gripping film released three years ago, *A Hidden Life*. It was a film directed by Terence Malick, the most spiritually gifted of directors in the world today. It is a stunningly beautiful picture and it portrayed the incredible story of an ordinary man, Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer who refused to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler or fight in the Nazi army during World War II. Franz was a simple man who lived and worked with his wife Franziska, his mother, and his three daughters in the rolling hills of Sankt Radegund, a town in Upper Austria bordering the German State Bavaria. While carrying out his duties as husband and bread-winner for his wife and three daughters, this ordinary man began "thinking deeply about obedience to legitimate authority and obedience to God, about mortal life and eternal life and about Jesus' suffering and Passion." Franz was neither an agitator nor an activist nor part of any anti-fascist movement, but in 1938 he was the only local citizen to vote against the "Anschluss" (annexation of Austria to Germany by the Third Reich). In February 1943, the young farmer Jägerstätter was conscripted definitively into the Wehrmacht, the German army. A few days after his refusal, he was imprisoned. During this time, Jägerstätter had ample opportunities to change his mind. However, by now, he had been convinced that the war by Germany was unjust. He wanted no part in that evil. He proposed to serve as a paramedic on the front, but this request was turned down. In July, he was sentenced to death and on the afternoon of August 9, 1943, he was decapitated Brandenburg-Görden Prison. He was only 36 years old.

This is the story of a man with a passion for God. Not a story of patriotism, of pacifism, or even family love. *A Hidden Life* is a story of passion for God above all else – a passion that was rooted deeply in a man's devout Catholic faith. There were many clues. A large crucifix hanging in the family home, a huge image of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in the living room, his volunteer work as a sacristan at the local church, and the family prayer life: everything testified eloquently of the faith lived by this man and his family. Their Catholicism was not ostentatious or self-conscious—it was in their DNA, it was in their blood. Franz Jägerstätter's passion for God was not the result of some fanatic adherence to a code of ethics, or a conscience formed by rigid, abstract moral ideals divorced from life. First and foremost, it was passion for the God made flesh Jesus Christ, Who said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:37-39).

“For whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” This is the drama that was at the heart of Franz Jägerstätter’s life. By putting God first, he entered willingly into the desert of temptation and eventually onto Calvary - into a participation in the very Passion of Christ. From the beginning until the end, there was not a moment of rest. The Nazis constantly harassed him and threatened him; his small town mostly turned against him; and even the local priest and bishop both tried to dissuade him. The whole world was treating him as a pariah. His wife Franziska was the only one he could count on in those dark days. The physical, mental, and even spiritual pressure on him and his wife was relentless. Does he think he knows better than everyone else? Is he that prideful? Why couldn’t he see that the God for whom he was making a supreme sacrifice was abandoning him? That this could end in his death, and the destitution of his wife and children? That no one will know or care what he was doing? An out was repeatedly offered to him: if he would just sign this paper, he shall go free and it shall all be over. And yet, in the face of overwhelming opposition and inescapable evil, he stood firm – not completely from his own inner strength, for he was being torn apart inside whenever he thought of his family to be left destitute for his death. He stood firm because of his passion for God. It was told that there was a poignant moment when Franz even branded Jesus’ Sacred Heart upon his own chest in the midst of his wrestling with his conscience, in order to remind himself to whom his heart truly belonged amidst the deafening swelling choruses of “Heil Hitler!”

On 9 August, before being executed, Franz wrote: "If I must write... with my hands in chains, I find that much better than if my will were in chains. Neither prison nor chains nor sentence of death can rob a man of the Faith and his free will. God gives so much strength that it is possible to bear any suffering.... People worry about the obligations of conscience as they concern my wife and children. But I cannot believe that, just because a man has a wife and children, he is free to offend God". Franz Jägerstätter refused to render to Caesar what belonged to God and paid with his life.

When we choose to put God first, our actions and our choices matter little to the world. In fact, most of the martyrs who put God first and lost their lives died in complete oblivion. But God never forgets. Our decision to put God first will remain hidden from others, because we shall be always hidden with Christ in God. But God knows our hearts, and He will make sure everything works together for the good of those who love Him.

(This article was composed based on information gathered from the Vatican website and other Catholic news sources on the internet.)

March 20, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

Repentance is key to Lent's discipline. One of the ways the Church encourages us to give repentance primacy in our life is by making an examination of conscience every night before bed. Christians have had this habit for centuries. It's a way to make sure that we never let a sin or a habit of selfishness take root in our hearts and obstruct God's plan for our life. A nightly conscience exam is like brushing your teeth. It doesn't take much time, but if you do it every day, it makes a big difference in your health (and in your breath). An examination of conscience is a prayer. An easy way I found from an article online advises people to do this exam of conscience by following the simple formula of T + 3. The "T" stands for "Thanks". First, before we go to sleep, we thank God for whatever blessings were most apparent during the day. Our life should be a continuous act of

thanksgiving to God. But what can be more appropriate than to thank Him before we close our eyes - maybe for the last time on this earth!

Then comes the "3". That "3" stands for taking a quick look at how we lived our three most important relationships throughout the day. The first relationship is with God. Did I pray today? Did I pay attention to God? Did I obey my conscience? The second relationship is with other people. Did I love my neighbor as myself? Did I do unto others what I would have them do unto me? The third relationship is with myself. Did I give in to pleasure-seeking, laziness, procrastination, or irresponsibility?

As we review these three relationships we always find both failures to repent from and successes to be grateful for. In due time, we shall grow in our love of God!

March 27, 2022: My dear people,

On Friday, March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis carries out a solemn Act of Consecration of humanity, and Russia and Ukraine in particular, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. At the Holy Father's request, Archbishop Sample invites all priests, religious and faithful to join him in raising a heartfelt plea to our Blessed Mother. You can recite this prayer any time!

**Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary - Basilica of Saint Peter
25 March 2022**

O Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, in this time of trial we turn to you. As our Mother, you love us and know us: no concern of our hearts is hidden from you. Mother of mercy, how often we have experienced your watchful care and your peaceful presence! You never cease to guide us to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Yet we have strayed from that path of peace. We have forgotten the lesson learned from the tragedies of the last century, the sacrifice of the millions who fell in two world wars. We have disregarded the commitments we made as a community of nations. We have betrayed peoples' dreams of peace and the hopes of the young. We grew sick with greed, we thought only of our own nations and their interests, we grew indifferent and caught up in our selfish needs and concerns. We chose to ignore God, to be satisfied with our illusions, to grow arrogant and aggressive, to suppress innocent lives and to stockpile weapons. We stopped being our neighbor's keepers and stewards of our common home. We have ravaged the garden of the earth with war and by our sins we have broken the heart of our heavenly Father, who desires us to be brothers and sisters. We grew indifferent to everyone and everything except ourselves. Now with shame we cry out: Forgive us, Lord!

Holy Mother, amid the misery of our sinfulness, amid our struggles and weaknesses, amid the mystery of iniquity that is evil and war, you remind us that God never abandons us, but continues to look upon us with love, ever ready to forgive us and raise us up to new life. He has given you to us and made your Immaculate Heart a refuge for the Church and for all humanity. By God's gracious will, you are ever with us; even in the most troubled moments of our history, you are there to guide us with tender love.

We now turn to you and knock at the door of your heart. We are your beloved children. In every age you make yourself known to us, calling us to conversion. At this dark hour, help us and grant us your comfort. Say to us once more: "Am I not here, I who am your Mother?" You are able to untie the knots of our hearts and of our times. In you we place

our trust. We are confident that, especially in moments of trial, you will not be deaf to our supplication and will come to our aid.

That is what you did at Cana in Galilee, when you interceded with Jesus and he worked the first of his signs. To preserve the joy of the wedding feast, you said to him: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). Now, O Mother, repeat those words and that prayer, for in our own day we have run out of the wine of hope, joy has fled, fraternity has faded. We have forgotten our humanity and squandered the gift of peace. We opened our hearts to violence and destructiveness. How greatly we need your maternal help!

Therefore, O Mother, hear our prayer.

Star of the Sea, do not let us be shipwrecked in the tempest of war.

Ark of the New Covenant, inspire projects and paths of reconciliation. Queen of Heaven, restore God's peace to the world.

Eliminate hatred and the thirst for revenge, and teach us forgiveness.

Free us from war, protect our world from the menace of nuclear weapons. Queen of the Rosary, make us realize our need to pray and to love. Queen of the Human Family, show people the path of fraternity. Queen of Peace, obtain peace for our world.

O Mother, may your sorrowful plea stir our hardened hearts. May the tears you shed for us make this valley parched by our hatred blossom anew. Amid the thunder of weapons, may your prayer turn our thoughts to peace. May your maternal touch soothe those who suffer and flee from the rain of bombs. May your motherly embrace comfort those forced to leave their homes and their native land. May your Sorrowful Heart move us to compassion and inspire us to open our doors and to care for our brothers and sisters who are injured and cast aside.

Holy Mother of God, as you stood beneath the cross, Jesus, seeing the disciple at your side, said: "Behold your son" (Jn 19:26). In this way he entrusted each of us to you. To the disciple, and to each of us, he said: "Behold, your Mother" (v. 27). Mother Mary, we now desire to welcome you into our lives and our history. At this hour, a weary and distraught humanity stands with you beneath the cross, needing to entrust itself to you and, through you, to consecrate itself to Christ. The people of Ukraine and Russia, who venerate you with great love, now turn to you, even as your heart beats with compassion for them and for all those peoples decimated by war, hunger, injustice and poverty.

Therefore, Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world. The "Fiat" that arose from your heart opened the doors of history to the Prince of Peace. We trust that, through your heart, peace will dawn once more. To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world.

Through your intercession, may God's mercy be poured out on the earth and the gentle rhythm of peace return to mark our days. Our Lady of the "Fiat", on whom the Holy Spirit descended, restore among us the harmony that comes from God. May you, our "living fountain of hope", water the dryness of our hearts. In your womb Jesus took flesh; help us to foster the growth of communion. You once trod the streets of our world; lead us now on the paths of peace.

Amen.

April 3, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

Have you ever wondered why the mother was absent in the Gospel story of the prodigal son from Luke's? A Dominican preacher posed the question and I think it was provocative! Anyway, where was she when the son decided to leave home and go in pursuit of a life of sinful pleasures? Where was she when he was half starving to death far away from home? Where was she when that scoundrel son of hers ran into the arms of her husband, having come to his senses? Well, there is an obvious answer, but I don't like obvious answers! I would like to imagine something else, something more evocative and poignant! I would like to think that she might have had an illness or a disability so severe that she could not take an active part in the life of her family – remember this is a Jewish family! And yet, is it a far-fetched thing to imagine that, somehow, she managed to stay involved with her family and care for them through her prayers? Is it far-fetched to think that she never gave up on her son, in the same way her husband never gave up on him? Now that her son was gone, she would have prayed for him without fail – day after day, week after week, year after year! And do you suppose that the good God was not going to be moved greatly by her prayers, and the prayers of her husband? Of course, God was touched! That's why He set in motion all the events leading up to his conversion and his return! I would not be surprised if at the General Resurrection, we should learn about the truth of the story of the prodigal son – the truth of a mother who cried her son into salvation!

Of course, in the story of the prodigal son, the merciful father was the main protagonist, but I dare say that his mother would have been the silent protagonist! Because, isn't it true that our mothers are the true protagonist in the life of us, their children? "They remind us where we come from, where our home is." That is to say, they remind us of God, and they are our conscience – even after they have been long dead and buried! That is why it is a cause of such great sorrow for mothers when they see their children abandoning their faith. Such a mother would touch the heart of God with her tears! When St Monica mourned for her wayward son Augustine, she went to St. Ambrose begging him to knock some sense into his head. But the saint refused, however, since he saw that Augustine was too stubborn to listen to him. But when St Monica kept on begging, St. Ambrose reassured her, "Go your way and God bless you, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish."

Ever the protagonists, the champions, the advocates, mothers will still love their children even if their children turn wicked. At the same time, there is no courage like the courage of a mother who speaks truth to her child, even if her child is the most powerful man on earth! For instance, when Keke Geladze the mother of Joseph Stalin met him for the last time shortly before she died, Stalin is reported to have said to her "Mama, do you remember our tsar? Well, I'm something like the tsar," to which she replied "You would have done better to become a priest!" (Wikipedia).

On March 25, the pope consecrated Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The pope and the bishops of the world entrust these two countries to the maternal heart of the Mother of God. Is it a far-fetched thing to think that, by his action, the Holy Father somehow shows us that he has not given up on the cause of peace, that he has not given up on Russia, and that he has not despaired of Vladimir Putin! Who else is not despairing of Vladimir Putin? Archbishop Borys Gudziak, the Ukrainian Archbishop of Philadelphia! He said on March 5. "We pray for the people, for the refugees. We pray for the conversion of Vladimir Putin!" I, for one, will continue to pray for his conversion. It's not a hopeless cause! Do you know he was baptized as an Orthodox Christian as an infant by his

mother? She concealed the whole thing, for Putin's father was a high-ranking official in the local communist party.

And so, even at this late hour, we know nothing is hopeless as long as our hearts continue to reach out to our Lady asking for her help. Years ago, she saved Portugal from the terrors of WWII. She can save Ukraine today!

April 17 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday is Easter Sunday. I beg the Lord to shower His Blessings on you all! I want to focus this week's bulletin column on something very essential to us Catholics: the Holy Mass! I shared these thoughts with people on Holy Thursday at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. What follows below has been taken almost entirely from a chapter on Padre Pio's Mass in a book by Father Gabriele Amorth, who was the chief exorcist of Rome. He knew Padre Pio personally for 25 years. His book, Padre Pio is an amazing account of St. Padre Pio's holiness. But above all, it is about his love and devotion for the Holy Mass.

"Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) commemorates the Last Supper, when Jesus Christ established the sacrament of Holy Communion prior to his arrest and later crucifixion. It also commemorates his institution of the priesthood, through which the Church uses the words of consecration over bread and wine during Holy Mass, so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Thursday is all about the Mass, and the priesthood which serves the mystery of the Holy Mass.

The essential nature of the Mass is the same because Christ is always the primary priest. But the priest also brings into the Mass his own personality and devotion, even if unintentionally. You, too, when you attend Mass. Your relationship to our Lord is reflected in the way you attend Mass. These insights came from a book by Fr. Gabriele Amorth, the chief exorcist of Rome, who wrote a wonderful book about Padre Pio. Chuck McDonald loans me the book! And so, on this most holy night when we commemorate the Lord's Supper, I thought I would share with you what Fr. Gabriele said about Padre Pio's Mass as the way for you to see the Mass through the eye of someone who witnessed a saint at the altar.

Padre Pio put his entire self into every Mass he celebrated: his love for God Crucified, for the God who is Love, for the God who is Victim for sins, for the God who is Savior. The life of Padre Pio was a life of an uninterrupted meditation and imitation of the Passion of Christ, accompanied by many tears – tears over his horror for sins, tears for his love for Jesus, tears for souls in purgatory, for the Church and for the world. Our Lord personally handpicked Padre Pio to assist Him in the work of redemption: the struggles against Satan, the dark night of faith, culminating in the visible stigmata. So it should come as no surprise that when Padre Pio said Mass, it truly looked as if he was reliving the Passion of Christ. When he went up the altar, one painful step after another, it really seemed as if he was going up to Calvary. Everyone's eyes were fixed on that face and its evident contortions of suffering, although equally evident were Padre Pio's efforts to keep them from showing. Tears would often stream down his face, and he would wipe them with a handkerchief. Then there was the striking of breast at the mea culpa and at the Agnus Dei with blows so hard it was a mystery how he could do it with his wounded hands; the prolonged kneeling that sometimes gave the impression that he could not get up; and the long pauses, with his eyes staring and shrouded with tears, when it seemed that he could not go on anymore.

People have called Padre Pio's Mass a supernatural spectacle. There was nothing theatrical about it. But why did people from all over the world come to such an uncomfortable place and at such an ungodly hour to attend that seemingly interminable Mass? And when it did come to an end, why would they want it to last even longer? There is no doubt that Padre Pio was reliving the Passion of Jesus. Many saints with stigmata relived the Passion during Holy weeks. But no one lived it at the Mass like Padre Pio.

There was no special mystery in the Mass of Padre Pio; the true mystery, of which we understand so little, is the Mass itself! The Mass is a sacrifice. The Mass is the unbloody Sacrifice of the Cross. The Mass is the immolation of Jesus, who offers Himself to the Father as a victim for us and gives Himself to us as the food of eternal life. We try to express the truths of the Mass with words, but they are never adequate. The people at Padre Pio's Mass were really making an effort to understand the true meaning of the Mass. Many priests and lay people said that they came to understand the Mass better only after they had attended the Masses of Padre Pio.

Asked to explain the holy Mass, Padre Pio replied, "My children, how can I explain it to you? The Mass is infinite, like Jesus." And he added, "The world could go on even without the sun, but it could not go on without the Mass." It has been known that people had come to his Masses out of curiosity, but they left crying like children. Men who did not believe, and during that sacrifice felt all their doubts disappear. So many people arrived at his Masses had been hardened against repentance, hardened against changing their ways, and during Mass suddenly felt moved in their souls to form the firm resolution to convert back to God. Many young men and women who, during the sacrifice, saw all of their uncertainties crumble and gave themselves entirely to God in the priestly or religious life.

Every Mass was an agony for Padre Pio. But the graces came down like rain, and often they were extraordinary. There was no need for explanation: it was clear that this was truly a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus, to which was united the sacrifice of the priest, with those present striving to take part in it also."

April 24, 2022: My Dear parishioners,
He is risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia!

You know, I used to be very nervous and anxious around the last three days of Holy Week - not just because of the amount of work and the complexities of various liturgies, but also because of the weather! But now, my outlook has begun to change. Because only recently has the newness of God begun to manifest itself to me, to become clear and obvious to me - time and again, here, in this place, this parish, which I used to consider as a place of exile! Only lately have I actually begun to understand how the newness of God can break through into my life - even now. How the dark clouds can be all scattered away at a moment's notice and the sun would shine brilliantly again - against all odds and predictions and expectations! If only we could see beyond the present circumstances, we shall experience this newness of God again and again in fresh ways. I want to tell you about the miracle of the sun in Sellwood that happened on Good Friday last week! This year's Good Friday was supposed to be the day our local branch of Communion Liberation had picked for our annual public Way of the Cross. It had been terrible for the last ten days prior. Every time I looked at the weather app on my iPhone, I wanted to cry! I had been so looking forward to this year's Way of the Cross that Patrick

Tomassi had organized for us last year that I could not bear thinking about having it ruined by the stupid rain! Every time I looked at the weather app, I felt dejected. I thought I would not survive this. I would catch a cold and become susceptible to COVID and die! That was how I was feeling for a long time. Then on Monday on Holy Week, four days before Good Friday and the public Way of the Cross, all of a sudden, the weather app changed its forecast – all of a sudden, Friday boasted the image of a smiling sun! Out of the ten-day forecast, only Good Friday had the smiling sun. The forecast remained unchanged. And when Good Friday came around, the real sun did show up and the sky was blue and clear and the weather was gorgeous! And I knew!

I knew that God would not be dictated how He would operate by a man-made lousy weather app! That He is truly free to act for me, that He truly has my interests at heart (for He does have a heart!), that His free decisions on my behalf should never be second-guessed! I knew, and I know again since yesterday that, regardless how dark life could become, how hopeless things might seem, I should never despair like Judas! There are no situations which God cannot change. There is no weather forecast He cannot befool. There is no pattern and history and recurrences that He cannot break! Nay more, there is no sin which He cannot forgive - if only we open ourselves to Him. Let the risen Jesus enter our life. Let us welcome Him as a friend, with trust: He is life! Start living life for Him, not as if He were real, but because He is real, and alive, and well!

Let me share with you a quote from Pope Benedict, who turned 95 this past Holy Saturday (April 16): “I am now facing the last chapter of my life and I do not know what awaits me. I know, however, that the light of God exists, that he is Risen, that his light is stronger than any darkness, that the goodness of God is stronger than any evil in this world.”

May 1, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

I have lost track of how many times I have used this space to ask for your help! I had been certain that the second phase of the roof project (and the resealing of the walls) would be my last appeal to you for help - at least for a few years! But here I am again with hat in hand asking for your financial support! But the recent problems with the ceiling which had a certain crack in the supporting truss required immediate attention. The ensuing repairs cost us around \$21,000 from our savings (which would have been used toward the North Wall eventually). After everything you have done and have given to the parish, I understand if you decide not to contribute to this unexpected, unplanned expense. In any case, I am glad that we were able to fix it in time before something tragic should happen, and I thank God for it.

Finally, please pray for the parish that we stay faithful to God, regardless of how difficult things might become for all of us! God bless you!

May 8, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

It was into the hands of men like Peter who denied his Master three times that our Lord entrusted His Church – a man who remained timid and weak and unsure of himself even after the Resurrection! Throughout history, the men who occupied the chair of St. Peter and his collaborators, the bishops, the successors to the apostles, were often not among the best and the brightest. In fact, they were not even among the holiest. In fact, among the popes and bishops and priests in whose hands the Church has been entrusted were sometimes found the most hypocritical, criminal, scandalous, worldly, scoundrels! That is why the mere fact of the Church's endurance through time is, without a doubt, a miracle!

If you would think about it, no regimes, no nations, no institutions, no organizations, no corporation on earth, could have survived that long if they had been governed by such sad and incompetent excuses for leaders! And yet the Catholic Church has endured for 20-plus centuries! And if you wonder why, here is the answer: because God is truly the founder of the Church, her Origin, and He continues to raise up countless saints, sung and sung, for her.

One of such illustrious members was a Jesuit priest born of Polish parents, and who was imprisoned by the Russian Communist for 23 years in Siberia. Born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania on November 4, 1904, the son of Polish immigrants, he grew to be a wild, tough kid, a bully and gang member. That's why his parents were incredulous when he told them he wanted to be a priest. Entering a minor seminary, he remained tough and stubborn as a true-blue Polish! Before long, he pulled another stunt: one day Ciszek simply presented himself to the Jesuit provincial in the Bronx in 1928 and announced, "I'm going to be a Jesuit!"

In 1929 Pope Pius XI announced to all the Jesuits seminarians that he was looking for volunteers to go to the Soviet Union as missionaries. Ciszek promptly volunteered. He was sent to the Russian Center, Russicum, in Rome in 1934 to study the Russian language, history and liturgy. On June 24, 1937 he was ordained.

Assigned to the Albertyn Jesuit mission in Poland, Father Ciszek worked hard among the Poles, the Ukrainians, and the Russians, awaiting his chances to sneak into Russia. Then the Soviet Union invaded eastern Poland in 1939. Taking advantage of this calamity and the ensuing chaos at the borders, with the blessing of Metropolitan Andrei Shetytsky, he slipped into the Soviet Union along with two Jesuit friends under the assumed name of Wladymyr Lypynski. Traveling 1500 miles by rail, he became a logger in the logging town of Chusov in the Urals, while carrying on his undercover missionary activities.

After a year he was arrested in 1941 by the NKVD, the brutal internal secret police of the Soviet Union, and taken to Lubyanka Prison in Moscow, a place where tens of thousands met their ends during these years. After six months of interrogation and brutal torture which failed to break Father Ciszek, the NKVD drugged him and, under the influence of the drugs, he signed a false confession. He was bitterly ashamed of this and vowed to always do the will of God for the remainder of his life. On July 26, 1942 he was sentenced to 15 years hard labor in Siberia. Surprisingly, Father Ciszek was kept at the Lubyanka for another four years. Perhaps the Communists were afraid that he would infect the prisoners there with his religion.

In 1946 he was sent to Norilsk, the northern most city in Siberia, to shovel coal as a slave laborer for 12 hours each day. Here he met another priest and was finally able to say Mass again. Polish prisoners made wine from raisins. His chalice was a shot glass, and his paten was a cover from a gold watch. Father Ciszek was overjoyed: "But my joy at being able to celebrate Mass again cannot be described . . . I heard confessions regularly and from time to time was even able to distribute Communion secretly after I'd said Mass. The experience gave me new strength. I could function as a priest again, and I thanked God daily for the opportunity to work among this hidden flock, consoling and comforting men who had thought themselves beyond His grace."

On April 22, 1955 he was released, although he was forbidden to leave Norilsk. He got a job in a chemical factory. Most of his co-workers were young women who quickly learned that he was a priest. They liked him and would cover for him when he had to leave work to perform a Mass, a baptism or a funeral, and several of these ladies became converts. His clandestine Masses on Sunday became so popular that he said three

Masses each Sunday and had to rotate the locations to keep the authorities from finding out. Easter midnight Mass in 1958 was held to an overflowing crowd in an abandoned barracks. The KGB knew what happened and told him to and never come back. Ten days later they flew him to Krasnoyarsk.

By his second month in Krasnoyarsk, he had established three mission parishes and was offering Masses with over 800 people in attendance. The KGB, quickly realizing what was happening, told him to get out of Krasnoyarsk and gave him only forty-eight hours to do it. From 1959-1963 Father Cizek resided in Abakan, one hundred miles south of Krasnoyarsk. He got a job as an auto mechanic and continued to carry on his clandestine missionary activities. He was suddenly released in exchange for a Soviet spy captured in the US. As he flew out of Moscow, he made the sign of the Cross over the land to which he had dedicated 23 best years of his human life.

One of things that surprised him the most was that, among the staunchest Communists, there were still some who wanted to have their children baptized. Some even became Christian Godparents. In the heart of godless Russia where God had been banished for decades and the Church silenced, believers continued to wander the barren godless landscape looking for God. And God did not abandon them. For many of those clandestine believers who needed hope to go on living and surviving in order to go home to their families, they needed God, they needed to go to Confession, they needed to hear Mass, they needed to hear the assurances of eternal life, and they had Fr. Walter Cizek! For them, Father was the Catholic Church. He was Peter. And he was Christ!

(Story taken from various sources on the internet and from books)

May 15, 2022: My Dear Parishioners

Today, I want to tell you about a person who was hand-picked by God for an extraordinary amount of suffering, but was able to harness his cross to his great spiritual advantage and for the glory of God. In fact, it is fitting for me to tell you his story in these cynical times, for this heroic man was priest, after the mode of Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest. True to his calling, he carried his burden with great grace and courage, refusing to be embittered, shattered, and crushed by his cross. All the way from the beginning of his illness right up to the end, he allowed himself to be transformed by God's grace into a source of great blessing and consolation for so many other suffering souls – even when he was himself dying of a horrible disease. I want to tell you his story today because the life of this great man sheds great light on the meaning of suffering and helps us find reason to go on in front of the many challenges of these times. Anyone in the crucible of suffering, of pain, of helplessness, of insecurity, of great anxiety can benefit tremendously from his heroic struggle to do the will of God. One more reason: I want to tell you his story today because this person's incredible life is being portrayed right now in a great film that features truly great Hollywood stars: Mark Wahlberg, Mel Gibson, and Jacki Weaver. The name of the movie is "Father Stu". That's right! The life of this great man is being dramatized by a movie that features Mark Wahlberg as the protagonist, Mel Gibson as his dad Bill, and Jacki Weaver, another Oscar nominee, his mom. Please go see the movie!

May 22, 2022: My Dear Parishioners

With the deepest gratitude to Almighty God, our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and St. Agatha, I want to invite you to join me in extending the warmest welcome to Mrs. Trista Casey as our incoming principal! I offer Mrs. Casey my most sincere congratulations upon her selection as principal for this coming school year. Mrs. Casey comes to us from All Saints School in NE Portland, where she has been serving as Sixth Grade homeroom teacher and Coordinator of Religion. Prior to her All Saints experience, she was at St. Francis School in Sherwood. Below is a short and succinct synopsis of Mrs. Casey's background and work composed in her own words:

I have been an educator for 19 years, with the last ten years serving in our Catholic schools. I believe in the education of the whole child grounded in Gospel values and the mission of Catholic education. Inspiring lifelong learning in others has always been one of my guiding principles and I will bring that inspiration with me to the St. Agatha community. On a personal note, I am married with two grown children and a long-haired Chihuahua named Jax. I am looking forward to meeting the students, staff, parents, and parish community and I can't wait to get to know everyone!

I want to sincerely thank all of the members of the Principal Search Committee for their engagement and hard work during the principal selection process. Their commitment to the St. Agatha School and Parish community was invaluable as we went through the selection process for our next school leader. I am confident in Mrs. Casey's leadership and know that she will be able to continue in her work as a servant-leader as she transitions to the St. Agatha School and Parish community.

I want to thank Mrs. Jones for all of her exceptional contributions to St. Agatha's during her tenure as principal. She has invested her heart and soul into the efforts of guiding our school through the most challenging set of circumstances. She has devoted every available ounce of energy into making it an outstanding Catholic grade school it is today. She has worked tirelessly to provide guidance and encouragement and direction to her staff in order to pass the Accreditation process with flying colors! And Mrs. Jones is still going the extra mile, even now, to make sure the school has a most seamless transition into a new phase with our new principal. I salute her and I am most profoundly grateful to her for everything! We wish her well and we will keep her and family in our prayers as she begins her transition to a new situation in Maryland.

Please join us for a "Goodbye" Reception for Leslie Jones on Sunday, June 5 after the 10:30 Mass in the Parish Hall!

God bless all of you and keep you safe in His care.

June 5, 2022: My Dear Parishioners

I want to share with you the significance of Pentecost for us as understood and taught by Pope Benedict when he was preaching on this day back in 2010. Marvelous food for thought and prayer!

"We know that the disciples sought shelter in the Upper Room after the arrest of their Lord and that they had remained isolated for fear of suffering the same fate. After Jesus' Resurrection their fear was not suddenly dispelled. But here at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit rested upon them, those men suddenly emerged fearless and began to proclaim the Good News of the Crucified and Risen Christ to all. They were not afraid anymore because they felt they were in the hands of the strongest One. Yes, wherever the Spirit of God enters he puts fear to flight; he makes us know and feel that we are in the hands

of an Omnipotence of love: something happens, his infinite love does not abandon us. It is demonstrated by the witness of martyrs, by the courage of confessors of the faith, by the undaunted zeal of missionaries, by the frankness of preachers, by the example of all the saints, even some who were adolescents and children. It is demonstrated by the very existence of the Church which, despite the limitations and sins of men and women, continues to cross the ocean of history, blown by the breath of God and enlivened by his purifying fire. With this faith and joyful hope let us repeat today, through the intercession of Mary: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth"

June 12, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

The passage we have for this past Sunday is from the Farewell by our Lord on the eve of His Passion. Here, Christ is preparing His disciples for living as the Church after He has ascended into heaven. Christ is telling the disciples that He will send them another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Christ has been the first Advocate during His earthly life. He has revealed to them Who God is and what God wants for us. He has taught them the central truth: God loves every human being, and God greatly desires to give each and every human person eternal life, which is a share in God's own life. But the time has come when Christ will no longer be present physically on earth. And, so, He promises his disciples another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Many a time in this world we are faced with the accusation that following Christ is an error. We are misunderstood or ridiculed. In those moments, the Spirit comes to us with His gift of peace and certainty that Jesus lives. Everything that makes this life possible: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control -these are the fruits of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit means all of those things, because of the one thing He does especially as His mandate: He makes Christ present for us, especially in the Sacraments of the Church, above all in the Mass. The Holy Spirit alone is responsible for Christ's being truly, really, and substantially present in the Species of the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit gives us the Body and Blood as the pledge and the foretaste of eternal life. Indeed, the Holy Spirit comes down upon the bread and wine so that they may become the body and blood of Christ anew at each Holy Mass. Yet, the Spirit makes Christ present for us in many other ways as well. The Spirit guides us, when we listen to the words of Scripture, to understand and to believe in the words we are hearing. The Spirit guides us, when we are trying to work out what the right thing to do is in our lives. He comforts us when we experience difficulties and loss in our lives. He strengthens our "I" in front of seemingly insurmountable dangers that threaten to wipe us out – mentally, physically, and spiritually. And for a faithful Christian He is there at the moment of death, and all the moments in which life and death hang in a balance. In all these ways, the Spirit makes Christ present. He maintains in our conscience the truth about God and about ourselves. He reminds us, He helps us remember God Who offers us life. He is not only at work within us at the profound moment of conversion, but He is also active within us whenever we make the choice to live well rather than badly, to be loving rather than selfish, to have courage rather than to give in to despair. He gives calmness and serenity so that we might not forget Who is really in control of our destiny when life and death hang in a balance!

June 19, 2022: My Dear Parishioners,

This Sunday is Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It is about what we receive from the Holy Mass - Holy Communion. And so I like to share this story of St. Padre Pio which I am taking from a book by Fr. Gabrielle Amorth, the chief Exorcist of Rome, who knew Padre Pio personally.

"Padre Pio put his entire self into every Mass he celebrated: his love for God Crucified, for the God who is Love, for the God who is Victim for sins, for the God who is Savior. The life of Padre Pio was a life of an uninterrupted meditation and imitation of the Passion of Christ, accompanied by many tears – tears over his horror for sins, tears for his love for Jesus, tears for souls in purgatory, for the Church and for the world. Our Lord personally handpicked Padre Pio to assist Him in the work of redemption: the struggles against Satan, the dark night of faith, culminating in the visible stigmata. So it should come as no surprise that when Padre Pio said Mass, it truly looked as if he was reliving the Passion of Christ. When he went up the altar, one painful step after another, it really seemed as if he was going up to Calvary. Everyone's eyes were fixed on that face and its evident contortions of suffering, although equally evident were Padre Pio's efforts to keep them from showing. Tears would often stream down his face, and he would wipe them with a handkerchief. Then there was the striking of breast at the mea culpa and at the Agnus Dei with blows so hard it was a mystery how he could do it with his wounded hands; the prolonged kneeling that sometimes gave the impression that he could not get up; and the long pauses, with his eyes staring and shrouded with tears, when it seemed that he could not go on any more."

"People have called Padre Pio's Mass a supernatural spectacle. There was nothing theatrical about it. But why did people from all over the world come to such an uncomfortable place and at such an ungodly hour to attend that seemingly interminable Mass? And when it did come to an end, why would they want it to last even longer? There is no doubt that Padre Pio was reliving the Passion of Jesus. Many saints with stigmata relived the Passion during Holy weeks. But no one lived it at the Mass like Padre Pio."

"There was no special mystery in the Mass of Padre Pio; the true mystery, of which we understand so little, is the Mass itself! The Mass is a sacrifice. The Mass is the unbloody Sacrifice of the Cross. The Mass is the immolation of Jesus, who offers Himself to the Father as a victim for us and gives Himself to us as the food of eternal life. We try to express the truths of the Mass with words, but they are never adequate. The people at Padre Pio's Mass were really making an effort to understand the true meaning of the Mass. Many priests and lay people said that they came to understand the Mass better only after they had attended the Masses of Padre Pio."

"Asked to explain the holy Mass, Padre Pio replied, 'My children, how can I explain it to you? The Mass is infinite, like Jesus.' And he added, 'The world could go on even without the sun, but it could not go on without the Mass.' It has been known that people had come to his Masses out of curiosity, but they left crying like children. Men who did not believe, and during that sacrifice felt all their doubts disappear. So many people arrived at his Masses had been hardened against repentance, hardened against changing their ways, and during Mass suddenly felt moved in their souls to form the firm resolution to convert back to God. Many young men and women who, during the sacrifice, saw all of their uncertainties crumble and gave themselves entirely to God in the priestly or religious life."

"Every Mass was an agony for Padre Pio. But the graces came down like rain, and often they were extraordinary. There was no need for explanation: it was clear that this was

truly a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus, to which was united the sacrifice of the priest, with those present striving to take part in it also."

And so, on the Sunday of Corpus Christ, we thank God for the Mass. We thank God for St. Padre Pio who said, "The world could go on even without the sun, but it could not go on without the Mass!"