Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart; for I am gracious and merciful.

Sunday, March 13, 2016
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Dear Parishioners,

This year we have used ‘Praying the Stations of Mercy with Pope Francis’ on Friday nights. Fr. Bill Huebsch wrote reflections based on Scripture passages that were connected to the station and had a quote from Pope Francis for each station as well. For the Seventh Station, Jesus Falls the Second Time, he has this quote from Pope Francis:

**The hallmark of the Christian life is not whether or not you will fail. We all fail. We’re all sinners. The hallmark is whether, after falling you have the courage to get up again. We get up with the grace of God; this is our witness. “Yes, I am a sinner, I did wrong but I go ahead because the Lord is with me.”**

Our parish reconciliation service is this Tuesday at 7:00pm. Come for the grace of the sacrament that you might more easily ‘get up again’.

I stopped in (late) last Sunday as the Daddy-Daughter dance was winding up. It certainly looked like everyone was having a good time, especially the father with his three daughters. Somehow all the dads knew the words and gestures to the Village People’s ‘YMCA’ and the daughters were trying to catch up to them. Or so it seemed.

We have had a small core of volunteers who have been the bereavement ministers for many years to families at the time of a death in the family. Some parishioners came forward recently to be a part of this important ministry. Some parishioners seemed to be a good fit so they were asked to be a part of it. Tomorrow night the whole group will conclude an eight week formation course that helped build community among them and gave some wonderful resources to use when helping a family plan a funeral. Now it shouldn’t be a burden on any one person to fulfill this ministry because we have enough who are trained to do so. What we could use more of are volunteers to sing in the Resurrection choir. Its consists primarily of singing in a group and helping to lead the assembly in the spoken responses throughout the funeral Mass. You do need to have some flexibility with your schedule since only a few days notice is given. We have enough people in the choir so you don’t have to feel obligated to sing at every funeral. If you can’t make one once in a while it is no big deal. The Bereavement ministry we offer, and the way we offer it, is one of the most important things we do at SJC. Please consider joining the Resurrection Choir and contact Jessica Koch.

We could also use a couple of people to help with setting up wakes in the church, welcoming the family, moving things, assisting before the liturgy begins, being available to the funeral home for details etc. Again, you need some flexibility with your schedule, but if you would be willing to help in this way please contact me.

After Easter I will be asking for help with additional parish ministries. Without so many wonderful people doing so many wonderful things we wouldn’t be half the parish we are today. Maybe the Spirit will move you to pitch in with a particular ministry. It will be yet another sign of new life in our parish family.

Keep those to be baptized and those to be received into full communion in your prayers these last few weeks of Lent. The Easter Vigil is a week from Saturday. If you’ve never been to one you are missing out on the highlight of the liturgical year. It is well worth your effort to join in as we welcome newly baptized and newly confirmed.

Until the Breaking of the Bread,
Fr. David

Please join the Institute for Diaconal Studies on **Wednesday, March 16 from 7-8:30pm at St. Linus, Oak Lawn.** The Exploring the Diaconate session will take place in the **Cardiff Center**, 10331 Linus Lane. Directors of the Institute will welcome you and discuss all aspects of the archdiocese’s deacon formation program, including application requirements and all elements of the formation journey. Wives of potential applicants are welcome and urged to attend as well. For more information contact Deacon Bob Puhala, bpuhala@usml.edu or 847-837-4564.
12 Steps for Everyone:
Tuesdays at 7pm and Thursdays at 1:30pm

The Lenten Journey of Discovery is for anyone: Does your faith and prayer life need a jump start? Do you experience increased levels of stress and fatigue? Do you feel weighed down by worry, anxiety or fear? Are you looking for a way to manage unhealthy patterns of behavior?

Adapted from talks by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, Fr. Richard Rohr and others, 12-Steps for Everyone utilizes the spiritual principles of AA so that anyone with a willingness to ‘Let Go and Let God’ can begin to experience lasting peace and serenity.

Each session is offered twice weekly. Our last sessions will meet on March 15 and 17. Materials may be downloaded from our parish website at http://www.stjohnofthecross.org/12-step-spirituality/.

Stations of the Cross
on Fridays in Lent in church at 6pm

CRS Rice Bowl
In this Lenten Year of Mercy we are invited to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy through the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl Program. Fill your cardboard Rice Bowl with your sacrificial offerings, pray and learn about hunger and poverty in a new country each week, fast in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable. Return your Rice Bowl on Palm Sunday (next Sunday) at Mass or to the Parish Center during Holy Week.

Communal Reconciliation Service
Tuesday, March 15 at 7pm
Hear God’s Word proclaimed, then take part in an examination of conscience. 9 priests, from our parish and elsewhere, will assist with individual confession and absolution as you are ready. Perfect for all ages.

Extended Confessions
Saturday, March 19 after the morning Mass

The Christian Churches of Western Springs invite you to begin Holy Week together on Palm Sunday with a Blessing of the Palms.
Sunday, March 20 8:15-8:30am at the Tower Green of Western Springs
Rain Location: Grand Avenue Community Center, 4211 Grand Avenue

Through the wonderful generosity of one of our parishioners, we will be giving each family praying with us on Easter Sunday a special gift book—Rediscover Jesus by Matthew Kelly. If you would like to help us greet visitors and parishioners and distribute this book, call the Parish Center. Watch for a book study on this book after Easter.
There is a saying, “It is better to give than to receive.” This might be more self-evident if it were not so very good to receive. Think of a few things we receive: life, family, children, work, food, friendship and talents, to name only a few of the best. Each of these is given to us. If we earn anything, it’s because we were first given opportunities, abilities, understanding, health.

So, as it turns out, receiving is essential. We cannot give unless we have received. And we cannot give more than we have received. After all, no gift is greater than the very first gift we receive: the gift of life.

How then can giving possibly be better than receiving? Look at the life you received. Good as it is, would you hesitate to give it for a loved one? In fact, you give much of your life to children, family, friends, even strangers. Now think about the gift of faith. As important as receiving this is, doesn’t it become a greater gift when you pass it along? Our giving is like a receipt for God’s gifts to us. And his gifts are made even better when we too give.

CRS has been given a great gift—a privilege, an honor and a calling—to help the world’s poorest people. It is our role to pass your gifts along to others. CRS Rice Bowl is one way we give back. We know you are always giving. We’re honored to be among those to whom you give. Giving truly is better than receiving. And, because of you, we know how much better.

Bring your Rice Bowl filled with spare change to Mass next weekend on Palm Sunday, March 20. Or bring your Rice Bowl to the Parish Center Office during the week. Watch the bulletin for the total donation our parish will send to Catholic Relief Services to empower and transform the lives of our brothers and sisters in need.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
Care for God’s Creation
Catholic social teaching inspires and guides how we are to live and work in the world. In this principle, Care for God’s Creation, we remember that God created every plant, every mountaintop, every animal—everything. And God said that these things are good. We find God in these good things, and so we must take care of creation—both for ourselves and for all of our human family.

Vaviroa’s story
Vaviroa is a smart, hardworking woman— with four children to feed. Though she had been raising her children alone for many years, their family was doing very well. They ate crops grown from Vaviroa’s family farm, and they even made money selling extra vegetables in nearby villages.

Then, in 2013, Cyclone Haruna hit, destroying most of northern Tulear, the part of Madagascar where Vaviroa and her children lived. Her fields flooded, and her crops died. With no way to feed her family, Vaviroa needed some help. She was already a great farmer—she just needed extra support to get back on her feet. And that extra support came in the form of seeds.

CRS’ seed fair program gives vouchers to farmers and their families so they can buy seeds, farm tools and livestock at local seed fairs. The goods they buy help them replant and rebuild their communities. The fairs also give farmers a chance to sell their crops in a safe place to people who need them. And these seed fairs help the environment by giving farmers the tools they need to care for God’s creation.

With the seeds she received at a CRS seed fair, Vaviroa has been able to replant her fields. Once again, her children are receiving the nutrients they need to grow and are able to attend school. Vaviroa is proud of all she’s accomplished—and looking forward to the next planting season.
Background on the Gospel

The Gospel for the fifth Sunday of Lent continues to offer lessons about God's mercy and forgiveness. Today we hear the report from John's Gospel of an encounter among Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees, and a woman caught in adultery.

In the chapter preceding today's Gospel, Jesus was teaching in the Temple area. Feeling threatened by his teaching and his actions, the chief priests and the Pharisees are already sending guards to arrest Jesus. The guards return, however, without arresting Jesus because they have been impressed by his words. Even more than this, some among the crowds are considering the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah. The chief priests and the Pharisees change their plan. Before making an arrest, they seek to gather more evidence against Jesus by posing a question intended to trap Jesus.

Today's Gospel begins by reporting that Jesus is again teaching the crowds in the vicinity of the Temple. The scribes and the Pharisees approach Jesus, bringing a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. They put to Jesus the question of what ought to be done in this case.

The Pharisees state clearly that according to the Law of Moses, those caught in the act of adultery were to be stoned to death. Under Roman occupation, however, the Jewish people did not have the authority to execute people; this is cited in John's passion narrative. To answer the Pharisees' question, Jesus must propose an action that will be either contrary to the Law of Moses or contrary to Roman law.

Jesus avoids the trap, however, by offering an answer that was not anticipated by those who posed the question. Jesus, after writing on the ground with his finger, addresses those who stand before him and suggests that the one without sin cast the first stone. Jesus then returns to his writing. This Scripture reading, by the way, is the only evidence we have of Jesus writing. Yet there are no specific details about what he wrote.

We can easily imagine the scene as the Pharisees and the elders disperse, one by one. Jesus has eluded the trap they had prepared. We might also give credit to the elders and the Pharisees who do not, in the end, claim to be sinless and worthy of passing judgment.

Left alone with the woman, Jesus asks where the accusers have gone. With no one remaining to condemn the woman, Jesus (the one who truly is without sin) sends the woman on her way, refusing to pass judgment on her and exhorting her to avoid future sin.

Jesus' response to those who accuse the woman is more than a caution to us about making judgment of others. It is a profound lesson in divine mercy and forgiveness. As sinners, we are all unworthy to judge the sins of others and we would stand convicted by God for our transgressions. Yet Jesus, the one without sin and thus our judge, offers us who are sinners his mercy and forgiveness. Redeemed by Jesus' compassion, we are sent to sin no more and to live in God's love and peace.

Living the Gospel

The "scribes and the Pharisees" use the proscription of the law in an attempt to entrap Jesus. He responds by confronting them with the reality of their own hard-heartedness and sinfulness. They slink away “one by one,” leaving the adulterous woman alone to face Jesus. He extends mercy and compassion as well as judgment and a command to change her life. Do we dare to stand alone before Jesus, bare our own sinfulness, and hear him say to us, “Go, and from now on do not sin any more”?

The Gospel reminds us that we encounter Jesus at our own risk: we will be confronted with the truth of our own sinfulness, with the tragedy of our own sinful living. But encounter with Jesus also brings hope: in the confrontation and invitation to repent Jesus offers the joy of new life. Even if we haven’t been all that faithful to our chosen Lenten practices, it isn’t too late now to resolve to open ourselves to encounters with Jesus so that we can approach Easter with a renewed spirit seeking new life. Like the crowd in the Gospel, it is often easier for us to focus on the sins of others than on our own weaknesses. Also like the crowd in the Gospel, we can encounter Jesus and face the truth of ourselves. Lent is a time to encounter Jesus, turn from our sinfulness in repentance, and seek divine mercy. The remarkable good news of this Gospel is that by facing and repenting of our own sinfulness we establish new relations with those around us. Acknowledgment of our own sins and how we have hurt others builds us into stronger members of Christ's Body.

May we stand before Jesus, turn from our sinfulness, and embrace new life. May we share with others the mercy and compassion with which God has blessed us.
Meditation: Return
Imagine the expression on the face of someone’s mother when she sees her adult child enter the house after a long absence. This child has been estranged from the family, in and out of trouble, and now returns home looking disheartened and disheveled. Perhaps you can remember such an expression on the face of your own mother or father. What emotions come through when the parent realizes that the child has returned?

What emotions do you see in the face of the adult child? So far, no one has said a word; the parent and son or daughter look at each other. If you could put words to those expressions, what would they be?

How do you feel when you come before God after an absence from prayer or other communications, such as attending church? What is your greatest fear at that moment? What is your greatest hope?

When others come to God and find joy in God’s presence, how do you feel about their joy? If a person who is, in some way, your enemy were to find joy in God’s presence, how would you react?

Imagine that you walk down a long hallway. You know that God is at the end of it, waiting for you to arrive. What are your thoughts and feelings as you approach? What reaction do you hope to receive from God when you enter the room? Are you prepared to say anything? Ignatian Spirituality

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons. In these parables God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.

Pope Francis

We live in a culture that values everything material and devalues that which cannot be seen or proven. But as Christians, we are called to put the world in perspective and “grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ.” (Roman Missal: Collect for First Sunday of Lent) One way we do that is by allowing the Eucharist to strengthen us to choose God’s will, as we so often pray after Communion.

Strengthened by Christ, we can join wholeheartedly in the words of St. Ignatius:

Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Deuteronomy 6:4

The Hebrew people were freed from slavery in Egypt and saved from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. Through Moses, God gave the people a choice whether or not they wanted to continue to live in relationship with him. They enthusiastically said yes. The one condition that God gave them was that God must be first in their lives. Nothing or no one else could be given greater priority. God has given us that same condition. We are tempted every day to let other people and things take God’s place in our life. At those times we can remember Moses’ instruction to the Hebrew people and join in an enthusiastic Yes! To God. Loyola Press

How am I tempted to let other people or things take God’s place in my life?

What is it that most distracts me from putting God first in my life?

Loving God, you led the Hebrew people to a promised land. Lead me from my sin and into the promise of your love. Amen.
Transforming Our Pain

One of the enlightened themes that develops in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and reaches its fullness in the crucified Jesus is the recognition of the transformative significance of human pain and suffering. Jesus builds on what his Jewish tradition already recognized—how to hold, make use of, and transform our suffering into a new kind of life instead of an old kind of death. It is the movement from an initial self-created order, to a risky allowing of necessary disorder, to the “third force” reordering that we call the resurrected life. It is a long slog, which we all try to avoid as long as possible.

The story of Job is both the summit and also the dead end of the Hebrew Scriptures. Humanity has never known what to do with unjust suffering—which is our universal experience on this earth—until Jesus gives his seismic shift of an answer. One could say that the story of Jesus is the same story as Job, who says, “I know that I have a Living Defender, and he will raise me up at last, will set me close to him, and from my flesh I shall look on God” (Job 19:25-26). This is Jesus’ exact faith affirmation on the cross when he first says, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), followed by, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34), and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Jesus is the new Job, but with a way out and a way through.

Pain teaches a most counterintuitive thing: we must go down before we even know what up is. In terms of the ego, most religions teach in some way that all must “die before they die.” Suffering of some sort seems to be the only thing strong enough to both destabilize and reveal our arrogance, our separateness, and our lack of compassion. I define suffering very simply as “whenever you are not in control.” Suffering is the most effective way whereby humans learn to trust, allow, and give up control to Another Source. I wish there were a different answer, but Jesus reveals on the cross both the path and the price of full transformation into the divine.

When religion cannot find a meaning for human suffering, human beings far too often become cynical, bitter, negative, and blaming. Healthy religion, almost without realizing it, shows us what to do with our pain, with the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust. If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it. If we cannot find a way to make our wounds into sacred wounds, we invariably give up on life and humanity. I am afraid there are bitter and blaming people everywhere, both inside and outside of the church. As they go through life, the hurts, disappointments, betrayals, abandonments, and the burden of their own sinfulness and brokenness all pile up, and they do not know how to deal with all this negativity. This is what we need to be “saved” from.

If there isn’t some way to find some deeper meaning to our suffering, to find that God is somehow in it, and can even use it for good, we will normally close up and close down. The natural movement of the small self or ego is to protect itself so as not to be hurt again. As I shared last week, neuroscience now shows us that we attach to negativity “like Velcro” unless we intentionally develop another neural path like forgiveness or letting go.

Mature religion is about transforming history and individuals so that we don’t keep handing the pain on to the next generation. For Christians, we learn to identify our own wounds with the wounding of Jesus and the sufferings of the universal Body of Christ (see Philippians 3:10-11), which is Deep Meaning that always feeds the soul. We can then see our own suffering as a voluntary participation in the one Great Sadness of God (Colossians 1:24). Within this meaningful worldview, we can build something new, good, and forever original, while neither playing the victim nor making victims of others. We can be free conduits of grace into the world.

Gateway to Silence: Astonish me with your love.
A song of mercy:
Music is indeed a heavenly gift and the lyrics below seem to poignantly frame God’s continual call to us through mercy, as well as God’s invitation for us to take part in the works of mercy.

“Bring your tired
Bring your shame
Bring your guilt
Bring your pain
Don’t you know that’s not your name
You will always be much more to me…”
~MercyMe, Greater

Mercy: The act by which God comes to meet us
While traveling through many theological circles throughout the past, I was always struck by a vision that was shared with me of what our final judgement might actually look like. This person of wisdom suggested that WE would be more than likely the one calling out to God all of those times that we fell short and sinned. Conversely, God would stand before us and recall those times that we in fact followed “The Way.”
In many respects to use legal imagery, we would be the prosecutor of our own failings while God acted as our defense attorney. What a powerful image highlighting God’s mercy, as well as providing us with a window through which we can begin to understand how God comes to meet us. As Pope Francis states in Misericordiae Vultus, “Mercy: The ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.”

God’s love for us:
Answering God’s call of mercy, and doing so in an active way where we take part in the works of mercy, is an obligation for any faithful believer. It is the way in which we acknowledge God’s mercy toward us, God’s tangible love for us. God’s intention for each of us is never to merely survive, but rather to thrive – this is directly rooted in God’s love for us.
We must attempt to wrap our head around Agape, that undeserved, unearned, unconditional love that can truly only be attributed to the love that God has for all of us as being imago dei. Mercy is bound in Agape as it is through mercy that God reveals God’s love as that of a mother/father figure. St. Augustine states that, “It is easier for God to hold back anger than mercy,” and isn’t this true of any parent who loves their own creation – their child? It is a guttural and deep unending love provided free of restrictions.

What is our role?
How then do we take part in the works of mercy? I would humbly suggest that we begin with living a life rooted in compassion. Pope Francis clearly reveals the link between compassion and mercy both in “The Face of Mercy,” as well as “The Joy of the Gospel.” Whereas judgement must be overcome with mercy, conflict must be combatted with compassion!
Compassion allows us to build communion while seeing others in their truest dignity. Mercy enables us to work together to build a bright future, a future that greater resembles the Kingdom of God here on Earth. This is our command! Put another way, mercy moves us toward understanding while compassion opens the door to dialogue. Dialogue should naturally advance us toward solutions and ultimately joy.
This is therefore why mercy is so critically important... As St. John of the Cross offers, “As we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love.” Articulated in another way, a former theology professor of mine defined sin as – THE FAILURE TO BOTHER TO LOVE.
Mercy enables us to love, to love in a way that perhaps most closely resembles Agape. Just as is the case with any aspect of our relationship with our Great and Ever Loving God, we must SIMPLY respond! “Only say the WORD and my soul shall be healed…”

By Rob Tasman, Executive Director of The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, where he combines his passions for faith and the law.
Seasons of Hope is our parish grief support ministry grounded in the healing wisdom, tradition, and practice of the Catholic faith. It is for anyone mourning the loss of a loved one or struggling with the grieving process. With the support of our faith community, Seasons of Hope sessions help us explore our unique journeys of grief and find healing and spiritual growth through scripture, prayer, reflection activities and faith sharing. Sessions are held three times per year; spring, summer and fall. The 6 week spring session will begin Monday, April 11 at 7pm. To register call Steve Weigand at 708-246-4404.

Remembering the Past—Remembering the Future Divorced & Widowed Conference
Sr. Jane Schlosser, RSM will lead a day of reflection for the divorced and widowed and those who care for them on April 9 from 9am-3:30pm at Blanchette Catholic Center in Crest Hill, Illinois. Register by April 1. Suggested donation of $35 includes lunch. Call 815-838-5334.

Our next parish sponsored program at The Well Spirituality Center will be The Earth is the Lord’s, Biblical Theology and Ecology on Saturday, April 9 from 8:30am-12:30pm. Call the Parish Center to register. Free to SJC parishioners.

Parish News

Seasons of Hope Grief Support Group
April 11-May 16, 2016

Moms’ Club Evening of Yoga & Friendship Tomorrow Night, Monday, March 14 at 7pm in the Parish Center
Put on something comfy and come for an evening of friendship, relaxation and yoga. Whether you practice yoga regularly or have never stepped on a yoga mat, take time for yourself and come celebrate the gift of YOU! Marie Gerken, 200 CYT will lead us in the yoga practice. Marie is a mother of four and a fellow SJC Mom! RSVP to our email and bring your yoga mat, but if you do not have one let us know that too at sjcmomsclub@gmail.com. We look forward to seeing you there. Suggested donation of $5 at the door. Wine and snacks will be provided afterwards.

Divorce Support Group
The Divorce and Beyond Ministry provides healing and pastoral support to those recently divorced or going through the divorce process. Divorce and Beyond is a faith-based program that includes education, discussion, reflection and prayer. Each session focuses on a different aspect of the divorce-healing process. Topics include: grief, stress, anger, blame, guilt, loneliness, forgiveness, and happiness. Former Divorce and Beyond participants lead each meeting and are committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment. ($10.00 manual fee can be paid at first session) Introduction & First Session Friday, April 15 in the Parish Center from 7:00—8:30pm. Call Steve Weigand @ (708) 246-4404 or visit: www.stjohnofthecross.org/divorceandbeyond to register online.

Stop in the church narthex to review all the weekly Words of Mercy we have reflected on so far.
This weekend at the 9:00am Mass our RCIA elect will celebrate the last of three rites called the Scrutinies. The readings at this Mass, in keeping with the tradition of the RCIA will be those of the “A” cycle and can be found on pages 138-140 in the Word and Song Hymnal. These very special rites are celebrated on the middle three Sundays of Lent at liturgies where the elect are present. The elect are those in our midst who are preparing for Baptism. These ancient rites are rooted in our human experience. We need to examine or scrutinize who we are, the areas of our lives where we are tempted, or seriously sin – in what we do and what we fail to do. We really need healing and the strength that can come from the support of our brothers and sisters in our faith community. This week as they are dismissed from Mass to further reflect on the Gospel they will be presented with the Lord’s Prayer.

Over the past several weeks the RCIA elect and candidates have been meeting in a period known as Enlightenment. During this time of preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, they have participated in forming and examining their hearts in preparation for these sacraments. Each Tuesday evening for the past four weeks they have been led in meditation and reflection based on the themes of the Gospels of the Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind and the Raising of Lazarus. The themes of Christian life that have emerged are: water which is refreshing, renewing yet powerful and terrifying; sight which allows us to see others, God, the world and ourselves as God sees us; and rising, hope, trust and being unbound which can keep us from experiencing the grace, mercy and power of God’s love at work in our lives.

Their journey serves as an inspiration and source of renewal for us, the baptized, on our journeys. The questions that they have been invited to reflect and ponder on are food for our own reflection. These questions have included: Where are the life giving waters in my life? What am I thirsting for in life? Do I have any dried-up wells in my life? What did you see as the man born blind, neighbors, Jesus or the man’s parents? How did you feel? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt all hope was lost? What freedom is God offering to me if I let God take over my life and undo my bindings? Next Saturday, March 19 our elect and candidates will be on retreat. Please continue to pray for them as their journey continues to the Easter Vigil and beyond.

Pictured are our elect at Mass last weekend during the Second Scrutiny. Fr. David lays hands, an ancient gesture used in the Church to symbolize the power and grace of the Holy Spirit upon the elect. The elect and candidates (those to enter into full communion in the Catholic faith) were dismissed with their catechist to reflect on the Gospel.

Reception Following the Easter Vigil ~ All are Welcome

As has been our tradition, parishioners are asked to bake homemade desserts for the Easter Vigil Reception. Bring your favorite baked goods to the Parish Center on Good Friday or Holy Saturday until noon. Put your desserts in non-returnable containers, i.e., wrapped on paper plates or in ziplock bags. Please label anything with nuts or items that are gluten free. Any questions can be directed to Ginny Grecco at 708-246-7371.
They are human people who are appealing for solidarity and assistance, who need urgent action, but also and above all, understanding and kindness. Their condition cannot leave us indifferent. We should remember that in tending the wounds of refugees, evacuees and the victims of trafficking, we are putting into practice the commandment of love that Jesus bequeathed to us when he identified with the foreigner, with those who are suffering, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation.

Pope Francis May, 2013

Where is your brother?

St. John of the Cross Parish has recently begun partnering with Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program.

Worldwide there are estimated to be over 17 million refugees who are unable to return to their country because of wars, cultural upheaval and persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Many refugees are coming from Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Myanmar seeking solidarity and assistance, and hoping to participate by learning the language, seeking employment and education.

The Refugee Resettlement Program serves over 290 refugees in Chicago each year. The Program which focuses on employment, daily living, and education seeks homes, furnishings, and assists refugees as they begin life in a totally new environment.

Our Outreach Ministry has been assisting the Refugee Resettlement Program by providing beds, helping with Welcome Packs of essentials, and sponsoring a trip for refugee children and our parish children to the Brookfield Zoo. As we look for ways we can help in the future we ask you to consider helping us by:

- Sponsoring all or a portion of a family’s first three months of rent
- Assisting with locating and securing safe affordable housing for refugee families
- Helping the Catholic Charities Employment Team find jobs for refugees
- Furnishing all or part of an apartment for a refugee family
- Buying a $200 bed for a refugee
- Donating Ventra transit passes or gift cards (Walmart, Aldi, CVS, Payless etc.)

Our Catholic faith calls us to follow the life and words of Jesus who came “to bring glad tidings to the poor . . . liberty to captives . . . recovery of sight to the blind” (Lk 4:18-19). Help us provide urgent action, understanding and kindness to the least of these, the hungry and the stranger in our midst.

To learn more contact Bill Bright in the Parish Center.

Bill McLaughlin, Refugee Resettlement Parish Rep

Let us not forget the flesh of Christ which is in the flesh of refugees: their flesh is the flesh of Christ. Pope Francis, May, 2013
Outreach Opportunities at Our New Sharing Parish, St. Gall in Chicago

St. Gall is looking for volunteers with a background in preparing income taxes for individuals. Volunteers would meet with parishioners at the Catholic Charities office at St. Gall. Translators will be provided if needed. Preferred times are Monday-Friday during the day, but evening appointments can be arranged. For further information/questions please call Marilu Gonzales at (773) 349-8835.

Raffles prizes are needed for a Father/Daughter Mother/Son Dance and Raffle on April 15th. Tickets to sporting events, gift cards (restaurants, stores, movie theatres, etc.), toys, small electronics, gift baskets or items to include in themed gift baskets (e.g. pampering basket for women, wine and cheese, family game night) would be greatly appreciated. Call Cathy Pesch at (708) 246-0432 for further information.

Have a fun night out and support St. Gall School. St. Gall Auxiliary Board is hosting its first ever Brew Fest benefiting St. Gall School Scholarship Fund at Lagunitas Brewing Company in Chicago on Tuesday, April 12 from 5:30-8:30pm. The night will include food, a cash bar, and raffle with many Chicago event packages. St. Gall is our newest sharing parishes on the southwest side of Chicago where eighty percent of students rely on scholarships in order to attend. Tuition for one child is $4,200, however, the actual cost to educate each student is $5,537. All proceeds from this event will go towards scholarships for students. Tickets are $25.00, but prices will go up to $30.00 on April 4th. Must be 21 years or older to attend. Hope to see you at Lagunitas for a fun-filled evening with a beer tasting and food for a great cause!!! Contact St. Gall School (773) 737-3454 for information on how to purchase tickets.

Get Answers to Your Most Perplexing Job Search Questions!

On Thursday, March 17 from 7-8:30pm in the Parish Center job seekers can learn new tactics to build confidence and help accelerate your job search success as well as network with experienced hiring managers, job coaches and fellow job seekers. We'll share ideas on how to target the companies and contacts that can move your job search forward. You'll meet other job seekers who will share ideas on what has worked for them in their search and who can connect you with new contacts from within our community. Please bring 10 copies of your resume and/or handbill to share with the group.

Make Easter Baskets Tonight

Parish 3rd and 4th graders are reminded to come to the Parish Center tonight from 6:00-7:00pm to help Crossroads teens make Easter Baskets for underprivileged children.

Girl's Basketball Coach Needed

We need a coach for Girl's Church League Basketball which begins in April. Please contact Jim Messina at 708-466-9131, or jamespmessina@gmail.com if you can help. Background check required.

Attend a Summer Work Tour

Spots are still open for our summer work tours. Adult chaperones are needed too. See the Crossroads website for details and registration forms.

Thank You to everyone who turned out for our Fish Fry last week and to the SJC Men's Club for preparing the delicious dinner. Proceeds from the Fish Fry support our teens attending summer work tours.

My life, my attitude, the way of going through life, must really be a concrete sign of the fact that God is close to us.

Pope Francis @Pontifex Mar 7
Last week our sixth grade students participated in a field trip to The Shedd Aquarium. During their visit they attended a squid anatomy class, researched squids, and also had the opportunity to get some hands-on learning in by dissecting a squid on their own. It was a really fabulous scientific experiment.

With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness...this love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus’ entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.

Pope Francis  Misericordiae Vultus

8th Grade Spreading Mercy
One of YC’s 8th Grade Home Groups spread God’s love at Helping Hand in Countryside. Helping Hand provides programs and services to children and adults with disabilities. Through their service the students shared Pope Francis’s message of joy. What a wonderful way to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. How have you spread God’s mercy and compassion this past week?

This Week at SJC
Monday, March 14  All School Liturgy 9:15am  Church
Monday, March 14  Athletic Board Meeting  7:00pm  School
Tuesday, March 15  Spring Book Fair All Day  School
Wednesday, March 16  Spring Book Fair All Day  School
Thursday, March 17  Special Lunch Day
Friday, March 18  No School – Staff Development

YC Schedule
NO CLASSES March 20, 21, 27, 28, Please complete home lesson
Classes K-6  10:15-11:30am  Sun, March 13, April 3, 10
6:15-7:30pm  Mon, March 14, April 4, 11
FFC  All work due April 15
Jr Hi Sm Groups  March 13, April 3, 17 in home settings
Adapted Catechesis 8:00-10:00am  March 13, April 10
In a deeply insightful book, *The Grace of Dying*, Kathleen Dowling Singh shares insights she has gleaned as a health professional from being present to hundreds of people while they are dying. Among other things, she suggests that the dying process itself, in her words, “is exquisitely calibrated to automatically produce union with Spirit.” In essence, what she is saying is that what is experienced by someone in the final stages and moments of dying, particularly if the death is not a sudden one, is a purgation that naturally lessens the person’s grip on the things of this world as well as on his or her own ego so as to be ready to enter into a new realm of life and meaning beyond our present realm of consciousness. The dying process itself, she submits, midwifes us into a wider, deeper life.

But that does not come without a weighty price tag. The dying process is not a pleasant one. Most of us do not die peacefully in our sleep, comfortable, dignified, and serene. The norm rather is the kind of death that comes about by aging or by terminal disease. What happens then is not comfortable, dignified, or serene. Rather there is a painful, sometimes excruciating, almost always humiliating, breakdown of the body. In that process we lose basically everything that is dear to us: our health, our natural bodily beauty, our dignity, and sometimes even our mind. Dying is rarely beautiful, save in another aesthetic.

And so how is the process of dying calibrated to help ease our grip on this world and more gracefully move on to the next world? Dying matures the soul. How so?

Writing about aging, James Hillman poses this question: Why have God and nature so constructed things that as we age and mature and are finally more in control of our lives, our bodies begin to fall apart and we need a bevy of doctors and medicines to keep functioning. Is there some wisdom in the very DNA of the life-process that mandates the breakdown of physical health in late life? Hillman says, yes. There’s an innate wisdom in the process of aging and dying: *The best wines have to be aged in cracked old barrels.* The breakdown of our bodies deepens, softens, and matures the soul.

Jesus teaches us this lesson, and it is a truth he himself had to accept, with considerable reluctance, in his own life. Facing his own death the night before he died, prostrate on the ground in Gethsemane, he begs his Father: “Let this cup pass from me! Yet, not my will, but yours, be done.” In essence, he is asking God whether there is a road to glory and vision of Easter Sunday without passing through the pain and humiliation of Good Friday. It seems there isn't. Humiliation and depth are inextricably linked. After his resurrection, talking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus, he says to them: “Wasn't *it necessary* that the Christ should so suffer?” This is more a revelation of truth than a question. The answer is already clear: The road to depth necessarily passes through pain and humiliation. Kathleen Dowling Singh and James Hillman simply format this positively: Pain and humiliation are naturally calibrated to move us beyond what is more superficial to what is deeper. Pain and humiliation, and there is invariably a certain dying in these, help open us up to deeper consciousness.

And we know this already from common sense. If we honestly assess our own experience we have to admit that most of the things that have made us deep are things we would be ashamed to talk about because they were humiliating. Humiliation is what humbles and deepens us. Our successes, on the contrary, which we do like to talk about, generally produce inflations in our lives.

The famed psychologist/philosopher, William James, submits that there are realms of reality and consciousness that lie beyond what we presently experience. All religion, not least Christianity, tells us the same thing. But our normal consciousness and self-awareness literally set up boundaries that prevent us from going there. Normally, for us, there’s this world, this reality, and that’s all! The dying process helps break open that contraction in our perception, awareness, and consciousness. It is calibrated to open us up to a reality and a consciousness beyond what we presently deem as real. But there are other paths to this too, outside the process of dying. Prayer and meditation are meant to do for us exactly what the dying process does. They too are exquisitely calibrated to loosen our grip on this world and open our awareness to another. As Singh puts it: “The path to the transpersonal realms, which the saints and sages of every age have known through the practice of meditation and prayer, appears to be the same transformative path that each of us traverses in the process of dying.” That's consoling: God is going to get us, one way or the other.

*Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser*
The Week Ahead:
Monday, March 14
9:15am School Liturgy
9:30am Spiritual Journaling
10:30am Step 11 Christian Meditation
1:00pm Little Rock Scripture Study
2:30pm Adoration
6:15pm YC Faith Formation
7:00pm Boy Scouts
7:00pm Consolation Ministers
7:00pm Mom's Club Yoga
7:00pm RCIA Planning
Tuesday, March 15
9:05am Tuesdays with Mary Rosary
7:00pm 12-Steps for Everyone
7:00pm Lent Communal Reconciliation Service
7:00pm RCIA
7:30pm Christian Meditation
Wednesday, March 16
9:30am Gospel of John Bible Study
11:30am Ladies Bridge
2:30pm Christian Meditation
3:30pm Spirituality of John of the Cross
Wednesday, March 16
3:45pm Cherub Choir Practice
7:00pm Chicago Catholic Scripture School
7:00pm Grecco Faith Sharing
7:30pm Traditional Choir Practice
Thursday, March 17
9:00am CARE Meeting
1:30pm 12-Steps for Everyone
3:45pm Youth Choir Practice
7:00pm Career Networking
7:30pm Contemporary Choir Practice
7:30pm Men's Club
7:30pm Crossroads Parent Book Club
Friday, March 18
8:00am School Staff Development Day
6:00pm Stations of the Cross
Saturday, March 19
7:00am Christian Meditation
8:30am Extended Confessions
1:00pm Palm Sunday Lector Practice
Sunday, March 20
Palm Sunday
12:15 Mass begins 15 minutes later at 12:30pm

Mass Intentions

Monday, March 14 Lenten Weekday
7:45am Muriel Albertson; Edward Wolak

Tuesday, March 15 Lenten Weekday
7:45am Walter Piszczer; Frank Reilly

Wednesday, March 16 Lenten Weekday
7:45am Thomas Stack; Our Beloved Dead

Thursday, March 17 St. Patrick
7:45am Patrick McNamara; Jason O'Brien

Friday, March 18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem
7:45am Roy Cook; Maria Pazzali

Saturday, March 19 Solemnity of St. Joseph
8:00am Harry & Bridget Morgan; Kathleen & Thomas Stack
5:00pm Don Winkel; Ignatious Janusek

Sunday, March 20 Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord
7:30am Shirley Kazragis; Deceased Members of the McDermott & Stack families
9:00am Mike Francis, Jr.; Frank Reilly
10:45am Pat Nebel; John Szczerba
12:30pm Henry Watson; Mildred Sabath
5:00pm Rosie Lonsway; Francis Reilly

** Note this Mass begins 15 minutes later than usual.

Pray for Our Sick
Rita Barnes
Anna Marie Berland
Robert Bright
Adam & Logan Bialas
Judy Burke
Margaret Cochran
Mildred Fitzgerald
Lynn Freking
Christopher Gallagher
Robert & Lucille Hartnett
Karen Hult
Ann Kalaska
Curtis Kerzich
George Kojima
Bobbie Misiora
Ann McGuire
Frank Mraz
Don Palaschak
Steve Pechous
Frank & Marge Pipal
Anthony Placek, Jr.
Kay Reidy
Monica Westell

Pray for Our Sick Our Beloved Dead
Patricia Kranz
Michael Gannon, brother of Jack
Cathleen “Casey” Nilles, daughter of Sandy and Anthony Nilles, sister of Carey & Katrina

Pray for Our Loved Ones Serving Our Country
Sgt. Steven Foody, son of Tom & Sandra Foody
Specialist Sebastian Grabacki, son of David & Jan Grabacki
A1C Joshua Tischler USAF Pararescue, grandson of Betty & Frank Madler & Mary Tischler

A Navy SEAL, a relative of our parishioner
PFC Daniel Pett, nephew of Kathryn Stitemet
Capt. James Maicke, grandson of Phil & Mike Maicke
Sgt. Robert Marburger, son of David and Kathleen Marburger
Sgt. Larry Waszak, grandson of Bruno and Barbara Gacek

For a staff directory go to our parish website at About Us stjohnofthecross.org/leadership/parish-staff/

Easter Mass for the Homebound
Archbishop Cupich will preside at the Easter Mass at Mercy Home to be televised on WGN Channel 9 at 9:30am on Sunday, March 27.

Community Events
Stay up to date on all the events happening in and around our community. From concerts to fundraisers, these submissions to our website reflect activities and causes important to fellow parishioners. Go to http://www.stjohnofthecross.org/community-events/.
Holy Week Schedule

Palm Sunday of the Passion of Our Lord, March 20 Masses
Saturday 5:00pm Vigil
Sunday 7:30am
8:15am Ecumenical Palm Blessing on the Village Green
9:00am
10:45am
12:30pm *(Note this Mass starts 15 minutes later than usual.)*
5:00pm

Holy Thursday, March 24
Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper 7:00pm
*Contemporary Ensemble*

Good Friday, March 25
Stations of the Cross 12:00pm
Passion of the Lord 3:00pm
*Traditional Choir*

Holy Saturday, March 26
Blessing of Easter Baskets 11:00am in the Parish Center
Easter Vigil, 7:30pm
*Traditional Choir*
Reception to follow the Vigil in the Parish Center. All are invited.

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord, March 27
7:30am
9:00am
*Children’s Choirs*
9:15am *First Floor Multi-Purpose Room in School*
10:45am
*Traditional Choir*
11:00am *First Floor Multi-Purpose Room in School*
5 Alive Teen Choir
12:30pm *(Note this Mass starts 15 minutes later than usual.)*
*Contemporary Ensemble*

At each Mass music will be led by a cantor, organ, and/or piano, and various instruments in addition to the choirs noted above.

No 5:00pm Mass on Easter Sunday. No parish babysitting this weekend.

Our Offertory Collections on Holy Thursday & Good Friday
On Holy Thursday (as on Thanksgiving) the offertory collection will support our parish Caritas Needy Family Fund. Using the Latin word for “charity” as its name, this fund provides financial support to our parishioners, who through unplanned circumstances face difficulty meeting a critical financial obligation. If you are unable to attend the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, but still wish to donate to this important collection, you may drop it at the parish center marked for the Caritas SJC Needy Family Fund or go to Giving Tab on our parish website and click on the Caritas link.

Once a year on Good Friday, we are called to support Christians in the Holy Land as requested by Pope Francis. Our Good Friday donations support the work of the Franciscans in the Holy Land, housing and feeding the poor, providing religious formation and education, maintaining shrines and parishes, and conducting pastoral ministry. For more information, visit www.MyFranciscan.org.