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CNS Photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

“While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” - Luke 2: 6 - 7





ORDAINED DEACON: Brother Vincent Yeager, a Third Order Regular Franciscan Friar of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Loretto, was ordained a deacon by Bishop Mark L. Bartchak in the chapel of Saint Francis Friary, Mount Assisi, on Saturday, September 9. Brother Vincent is a native of Queen of Peace Parish, the son of Alan and Carol Yeager, and a graduate of Penn State Altoona. Pictured are (left to right) Father Richard L. Davis (minister provincial), Brother Vincent and Bishop Mark. Brother Vincent is a fourth year theology student at The Catholic University of America, in Washington, DC. He will be ministering as deacon at Saint Joseph Parish in Herndon VA, which is staffed by the friars of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. He will continue to be in residence at Saint Louis Friary in Washington, while serving his deacon internship and completing his studies.

GIFT CARDS: The Family Life Committee of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Altoona, sponsored a tree where parishioners took a candle and purchased gift cards to be given to needy families in the area. Members of the Family Life Committee decorated small Christmas Trees with the Gift Cards on them, to be delivered to those in need.

Community

Grant Applications Sought

Hollidaysburg: The Nazareth Family Foundation is accepting grant applications for fiscal year 2018- 2019.

Grant requests must support the mission and criteria of the Foundation, which include: meeting a critical community need; strengthening the family; demonstrating collaboration; addressing the moral and religious renewal of family life, and demonstrating a holistic approach to serving families in need.

The Foundation, established by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth with funds from the sale of the former Mercy Hospital in Altoona, has been awarding grants to programs and services in the Blair County area since 1997.

To request an application packet, call Sister Michele Collins at (814) 660 - 2559; email

MCollins.NFF@gmail.com; or write to Nazareth Family Foundation, 601 North Montgomery Street, Hollidaysburg PA 16648.

Completed applications that meet the Foundation's criteria must be received no later than Thursday, March 15, 2018.

Prayer

Oblates

Johnstown: Four Benedictine Oblate novices will be installed at the Johnstown Deanery meeting in February, by moderator Deacon Michael Russo. They are Jerome Nevling, Lori Nevling, Jill Van Scoyoc and Lori Little.



SAINT NICHOLAS: Students at Northern Cambria Catholic School in Nicktown celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas on Wednesday, December 6. Benedictine Father Alfred Patterson, Pastor of Saint Nicholas Parish, Nicktown, celebrated Mass with the students and shared stories and images of Saint Nicholas. Later in the day, Saint Nicholas himself visited with students throughout the school. Pictured (left to right) are Anthony Lessard, John Weiland, Savannah Smorto, "Saint Nicholas," Shyana Burger, Father Patterson, Allison Moriconi, and Nathan Dumm.

The staff of The Catholic Register wishes you a blessed Merry Christmas, and a happy, holy New Year.

(Continued On Page 3.)



In The Alleghenies

Day Of Prayer For World Peace And Justice

The local Church of Altoona - Johnstown will observe Monday, January 1, 2018, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, as a Day of Prayer for World Peace and Justice. This day is not being observed as a Holy Day of Obligation in 2018. The faithful are asked to join in reciting this prayer on January 1:



O God, who have revealed that peacemakers are to be called your children, grant, we pray, that we may work without ceasing to establish that justice which alone ensures true and lasting peace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



CHRISTMAS FOOD BASKETS: Religious education students at Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Everett, helped prepare Christmas food baskets, for distribution to families in need in Bedford County by members of the Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish Conference of the Saint Vincent DePaul Society. All food items were donated by Saint John parish members and a donor contributed vouchers for each family to obtain a turkey or ham. Pictured are (left to right) Violet Johnson, Matthew Wilt and Sam Pratt. Father Derek Fairman is the pastor of Saint John the Evangelist parish.

(Continued From Page 2.)

The Benedictine Oblates are affiliated with Saint Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe. Beginning in February, meetings will be held on the first Monday of the month at Saint Benedict Church. The 6:30 p.m. meeting begins with Evening Prayer in church, and continues in the Saint John Paul II Center. Oblates are currently discussing the book **Everyone Needs To Forgive Somebody** by Allen R. Hunt.

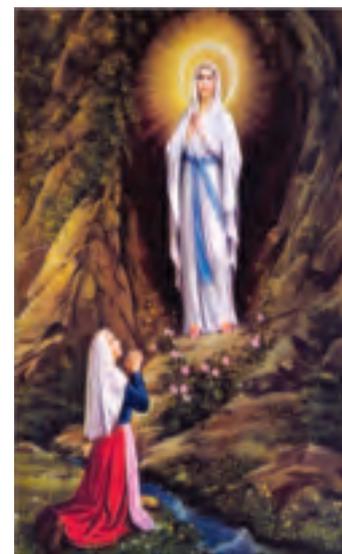
For further information contact Deacon Russo at (814) 288 - 3036, or michael.russo@atlanticbb.net.



50TH ANNIVERSARY: The Ladies Guild of Saint Andrew Parish, Johnstown, is celebrating its 50th year of service. The group was established November 19, 1967 in the office of Sister Bridget James, former principal of Saint Andrew Elementary School. Pictured are (left to right) First row: Lucy Podrasky, Shirley Pavlosky, Dolores Barron, Rose Mary Dill, Fran Hollan, Helen Baca, Helen Muha. Second row: Valeria Golob, Linda Zinn, Judi Keafer, Judy Rhoades, Joan Sidone, Angie Dayok, Maryann Ackman. Third row: Father Angelo Patti (pastor).

An Unforgettable Christmas Gift - - A Gift To Share

A Pilgrimage To Lourdes, Assisi and Rome



*Departs October 2, 2018
Celebrating the 160th Anniversary of the Apparitions of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, to Saint Bernadette*

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*Accompanied by Monsignor Timothy P. Stein
Pastor, Saint Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish
Editor of The Catholic Register*

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Point Of View

Wait, they said. Good news will come.

So I stood by the window every afternoon that fall of senior year, waiting for the mail truck to reach our street. I'd run down the driveway to see if any envelopes had arrived -- thick with acceptance or thin with rejection. My parents asked for updates but never nagged. They were waiting, too.

Finally came the one I had been hoping for. I tore it open, read the yes with shaking hands, whooped out loud, raced around the living room with my youngest brother, and ran out the door to get ice cream to celebrate.

The waiting was worth it. Every single second.

Wait, they said. The big day will come.

So we counted down months and weeks, waiting for the celebration to arrive. We planned the Mass and the honeymoon, the music and the reception. (My mom planned the flowers and food, thankfully!) We sent save the dates so family and friends could circle their calendars to join us. They were waiting, too.

Finally came the sunny Saturday in July. Our parents walked us down the aisle, and we kissed at the end. All the families danced till our feet ached, the little ones running round our legs. I never wanted the night to end.

The waiting was worth it. Every single second.

Wait, they said. The baby will come.

We had to wait longer than friends and family. Our lives became wrapped round with



Faith At Home

By Laura Kelly Fanucci
 Why Wait?

wanting. One year, then two. We wondered if we would ever have a child of our own.

Finally came a positive test, astonishing before my eyes. I jumped on the couches while my husband laughed (and cried). Then we raced to the store to buy another test, just to be sure.

When we surprised my family with the news on Christmas Eve, my mom and sister looked at me with shock, starting to cry. "We thought it couldn't happen!" they said. They had been waiting, too.

In August, he arrived safe and squalling in our arms.



Photo By Msgr. Timothy P. Stein

The waiting was worth it. Every single second.

Wait in hope, faith and love, the wise ones say. Wait and pray. Slow the rhythm of your hearts to God's time.

We young ones are always impatient (can we be anything else?), but when we listen to their wisdom, we learn.

Families are made by waiting. Made for waiting together.

In good times and in bad, our everyday Advents are the fabric of ordinary time, the cadence of life in families. God makes holy our longing and looking forward. We are changed as we wait together.

We have been waiting, our church universal counting down days like children tearing loops off the paper chain each morning till Christmas.

We await Christ's coming, he who is foreshadowed by all of the good things we wait for here and now. Joyful news and fresh beginnings. Holy love and sacramental feasts. Hopeful dreams and light in darkness.

His love is beyond our wildest waiting. Is there anything more wonderful?

The waiting will be worth it. Every single second. He teaches us each day.



Another Perspective

By Monsignor Timothy P. Stein
 I Wish You
 A Messy Christmas

One of the country singers has a song for the Christmas season that speaks about pretty paper, pretty ribbons, and all of the bright lights we associate with this time of the year.

One of my favorite spiritual writers, a Carmelite Father, says that kind of talk is best described as "pretty poison." Pretty poison, he says, can blind us to the fact that life isn't always pretty. And at Christmas, we are particularly susceptible to being infected by pretty poison.

Take a look around our churches. Everything is beautiful, carefully decorated. Our nativity scenes are a perfect display of a wondrous event. Think of your own homes -- all of the work you have done to make this Christmas celebration as perfect as perfect can be. Then ask yourself "Is this the way I usually live?" Have you succumbed to pretty poison?

At some point in this season we will sing "Silent Night." We all know the lyrics "Silent night, Holy night. All is calm, all is bright." All is calm? All is bright? Really? Really? Pretty poison!

Think about that very first Christmas. How calm and bright could it have been? Do you think it looked anything at all like our nativity scenes say it looked? There were two young people -- hardly more than kids -- alone in a big city, with a newborn baby. They were not housed in a decent dwelling with all modern comforts -- they were in a stable, most probably a cave -- dank, dark, wet, uncomfortable. They shared that space with animals. Animals smell. The sheep that came with the shepherds would have been enough to raise the stench level to the unbearable. All is calm? All is bright? Hardly. Pretty poison indeed!

And yet, even if the first Christmas was not as beautiful as we would like to imagine it to be, and even if our own Christmas celebrations are not as perfect as we would like to make them, there is something about it all that is worth celebrating, worth taking delight in. We celebrate the fact that God wasn't taken in by pretty poison! God came into a world that was far from perfect -- and continues to come into a world that is far from perfect -- and shares life with us, just as we are. He sees us, He knows us, He recognizes the mess that we have made of things, and He still chooses to be with us. Dress it up all you might like with pretty paper, pretty ribbons, bright lights and happy songs, and the awesome reality is that God is here in our midst. He came to weak people -- people who don't always get things right -- people who are striving to be perfect but who often miss the mark -- and He says "It's okay. It's all right. This is where I choose to be. This is where I want to be. You are my people, and I am your God."

Strip away everything that is pretty -- take away everything that is fancy -- shmansy, and you are left with a reality that is more beautiful than anything you can imagine: A God who loves us so much that He became one of us in all things but sin, who lived among us, worked like we do, and who suffered and died for us so that we can share His life forever.

A messy Christmas is a genuine Christmas. A messy Christmas reminds us of just what it is we're celebrating and why we're celebrating. I wish you all a very messy Christmas and a topsy-turvy New Year. May God find you, and may you find God, in the midst of it all!

Bishop Mark's Christmas Message - 2017



I recently received a Christmas card with a picture of Mary and Joseph and infant Jesus in the Manger. On the inside there were a few verses written by the 19th century Scottish poet and writer, Robert Louis Stevenson.

I remember him as the author of **Treasure Island**, and **The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**. I will also admit having paged through his poetry in **A Child's Garden of Verses** when I was a child, but his descriptions of "buccaneers and buried treasure" are more memorable.

Speaking of memorable, the verses in the Christmas card are a prayer written by Robert Louis Stevenson asking for the help we need to remember the birth of Jesus. It also asks for an awareness of the impact that the Savior's birth should still have in our lives. Here is the prayer:

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the song of angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake, Amen!

I am sure that you will agree that it would do us good to share the angels' song, the shepherds' gladness, and the wise men's worship. But Stevenson makes it so clear that we need more, much more. The birth of Christ should make us want to be rid of hate that is replaced by love. The gifts and greetings that we exchange in celebration of Christ's birth should be genuine acts of kindness.

And, as Stevenson prays, the celebration of Christmas should make us ask the Father to rid the world of evil, and bless us with joy, clean hearts and good desires because the Lord Jesus brings us forgiveness and makes it possible for us to forgive others.

The story of Christ's birth includes envy, jealousy, rejection, hatred, and violence. It caused Mary and Joseph to take the child Jesus and run for their lives. But the truth is that the Lord Jesus closed the door of hate and opened the door of love all over the world. Unfortunately, we somehow manage to do the opposite. So how will it ever change?

After reading the Christmas card, I became curious about the hope that is evident in those few verses by Robert Louis Stevenson. I was not able to find any additional insights concerning his Christmas prayer. But I did find an anonymous Christmas prayer that expresses how much more we have received. And it expresses something that just might make a difference if we were thankful for what we have and who we are. Here is a prayer that any of us could say:

Dear Lord, in this season of giving and getting, I so easily overlook your gifts to me. Thank you for so many reasons to celebrate.

Thank you for a future filled with hope because it rests in your hands; for peace of mind when I keep my eyes on you; for joy beyond all my circumstances.

I'm grateful for what I often take for granted; for a place to live, clothing, food, and all the good things that you daily provide.



CNS Photo/Bridgeman Images

Thank you for the beauty of your creation; for sunny days, majestic sunsets, and twinkling stars. What a wonderful world you've created!

I appreciate those people you've put into my life who know my faults, yet still love me. Thank you for their love and support.

Thank you for being with me in life's trials, drawing me closer to yourself; teaching me to trust you more each day.

How drab, how empty life would be without all these gifts.

Most of all, dear Lord, thank you for coming to this earth, to live, to love, to die, and to live again.

Thank you for becoming a man, closed in by a body that got tired and worn like mine, that suffered on the cross for me.

Thank you for promising that you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And through receiving you I may know you now and someday live in the Father's House forever.

O, Lord, thank you for all your gifts to me.

Enjoy and generously share the gifts of Christmas, especially the gift of the Lord Jesus who closes the door of hate and opens the door of love for you and me and the whole world.

With prayers and best wishes at Christmas and in the New Year,

+ Mark L. Bartchak

+ Bishop Mark
Most Reverend Mark L. Bartchak
Bishop of Altoona - Johnstown

Responding To Sexual Abuse Will Take Years

*Responding to editors' requests for a regular sampling of current commentary from around the Catholic press, here is an unsigned editorial titled: "Responding to sexual abuse will take years -- and it should" from the Nov. 21 issue of **America**, a Catholic weekly magazine run by the Jesuits.*

The flood of revelations about sexual harassment and assault, whether in Washington or Hollywood, is unlikely to stop anytime soon. The walls of denial built up by position and self-protective ignorance have been breached. If the tragic revelations of the Catholic Church's sex abuse crisis are any guide, the process of reckoning with problems that have been avoided for decades will itself take decades.

Neither the church as a whole nor the editors of this review are in a position to prescribe a comprehensive remedy for the systemic patterns of harassment, abuse and denial. But there are pitfalls to be avoided and small measures of hope to be encouraged, and the church's experience has some lessons to offer.

The first lesson is that the voices of the victims must

be heard. The attention of media and society too easily turns to parsing the harassers' and abusers' excuses and apologies while simultaneously calling for their exile from public life and for policy changes that might have prevented their abusing in the first place. Sen. Mitch McConnell, responding to the accusations against Roy Moore in Alabama Nov. 13, joined calls for Moore to withdraw from his Senate race. Where many others had hedged their criticisms with "if these accusations are true," McConnell said squarely, "I believe the women, yes." While surely McConnell is not completely ignoring political risks and benefits, his clear attention to the voices of the women who have accused Moore is significant.

The second lesson is that while some form of social and professional exclusion may be a necessary first step in redressing the damage done by harassers and abusers, it is not by itself a sufficient response. The swift firing or ostracizing of abusers does not absolve institutions or communities of their collective responsibility, whether they were complicit in covering up abuse or merely ignorant of its prevalence.

The Puritan impulse to cast out the evildoer as the sole response to his transgression seeks catharsis rather than justice. Justice requires not only that past and future victims be made whole and safe but also that the structures that protect the privileged rather than the powerless be reformed. And justice also recognizes and encourages the possibility of redemption, after repentance and penance.

The church still needs to learn and relearn how to listen to victims. It also must face the reality of sexual harassment, alongside the problem of the sexual abuse of children it has painfully learned to acknowledge. But its experience offers evidence that it is possible to begin turning even an organization as large and as old as the church toward primary concern for victims. As painful as these most recent revelations of abuse and harassment are, they are even more necessary.

The views or positions presented in this or any guest editorial are those of the individual publication and do not necessarily represent the views of Catholic News Service or of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Support For Survivors

Support for survivors of sexual abuse is always available throughout the Diocese of Altoona-Johnston. Survivors are encouraged to seek help for recovery through any of the sexual assault centers in their area. All of the sexual assault centers offer:

- * 24/7 Hotline Services
- * Crisis Intervention
- * Case Management
- * Individual Counseling
- * Legal Advocacy and Accompaniment
- * Medical Advocacy and Accompaniment
- * Prevention and Awareness Education Programs
- * Sexual Assault Response Team (emergency medical care, emotional support, and medical/ legal examination)
- * Professional Trainings
- * Information and Referrals to other community services

Bedford County

Your Safe Haven Inc.
(800) 555 - 5671
Yoursafehaven.org

Also offers: * Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing
* Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

Blair County

Family Services, Inc.
(814) 944-3585
Familyservicesinc.net

Also offers: * Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling * Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

Cambria-Somerset Counties Victim Services, Inc.
(814) 288-4691 and (800) 755-1983
Victimservicesinc.org

Also offers: * Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling * Support Groups * Group Counseling

Huntingdon - - Mifflin - - Juniata Counties

The Abuse Network
(717) 242-2444
Abusenetwork.org

Also offers: * Crisis Counseling * Support Groups * Group Counseling * Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing * Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

Clinton County

Clinton County Women's Center (
570) 748-9509
Ccwcsafe.org

Also offers: * Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling * Support Groups * Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing * Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

Franklin - - Fulton Counties

Women in Need/ Victim Services
(717) 264-4444
Winservices.org

Also offers: * Support Groups * Group Counseling * Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing * Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors

Centre County

Centre County Women's Resource Center
(814) 234-5050
Ccwrc.org

Also offers: * Support Groups * Therapy/ Therapeutic Counseling * Safe Shelter and/or Transitional Housing * Transportation * Additional Services for Domestic Violence Survivors * Civil Legal Representation in family, law, immigration or Title IX matters * Safe Custody Exchange and Supervised Visitation

Reporting Child Abuse

Bishop Mark L. Bartchak and the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown are firmly committed to protecting children and young people. If you have any information concerning suspected sexual or other abuse of minors, you are urged to report it immediately to:

- PA Child Line 1 - 800- 932 - 0313 (intake is available 24/7)
- Pennsylvania Attorney General Hotline (888) 538 - 8541
- Pennsylvania State Police Headquarters (717) 783 - 5599 or your local Pennsylvania State Police Station
- Your local police department

If there is an indication of imminent danger, you should call 911 immediately.

The Diocese reports all information regarding sexual abuse of minors to law enforcement. You are urged to do the same. Anyone may and should report suspected child sexual abuse.

To report to the Diocese any suspected abuse of a minor, please call Jean Johnstone at (814) 944 - 9388.



A Prince In The Service Of The Great King

The Servant Of God
Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin
1770 - 1840

‘The Sight Which They Never Beheld Before . . . ’

*This article first appeared in the December 26, 2016 edition of **The Catholic Register**, and continues our tradition of telling the story of the Prince - Priest's first Christmas in the Allegheny Mountains.*

In a February 9, 1800 letter to Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore, Father Demetrius August-

tine Gallitzin wrote of his first Christmas in McGuire's Settlement, Cambria County:

“Our church, which was only begun in harvest, got finished fit for service the night before Christmas. It is about forty - four feet long by twenty - five feet wide, built of white pine logs with a very good shingle roof.



“The date to which the residents looked forward with some enthusiasm was Christmas Eve, for Mitri would celebrate his first Christmas Mass in the chapel.

“The event proved a memorable one. Candles made from beeswax adorned the altar, and the most ornate decorations possible, laurels and evergreen boughs added color and charm.”

“I kept service in it at Christmas for the first time, to the very great satisfaction of the congregation, who seemed very much moved by the sight which they never beheld before.”

To better suit the needs of his ministry in the young republic, the aristocratic Father Gallitzin put aside his princely title and noble name, and adopted his mother's maiden name, and as “Father Augustine Smith,” served the congregation he gathered around him. In their 1999 book **Apostle Of The Allegh-**

enies, published by the Diocese of Altoona - Johnstown, Margaret and Matthew Bunson write of Father Smith's first Christmas Mass in his new home.

“The place Mitri chose for his chapel was on the land granted to the Church by Michael McGuire, on a slope some two miles from the McGuire farm. It commanded a splendid view of the surrounding countryside and was ideal as a symbol of unity for the entire community. The church itself was built largely by Mitri's own hands, using white pine for its walls, covered

way to the log cabin church. Far more diverse and rugged than the parish members in Taneytown, the flock that claimed Mitri, ‘Father Smith,’ as its pastor was comprised of farmers, grizzled old soldiers, Indian traders, and women and children who donned whatever they felt was their best attire.

“Over the hills and through the forests, braving snow and wind, they came to the new church, dedicated to Saint Michael (partly in honor of Michael McGuire) and were greeted by Mitri. Music and singing filled the cold night air with the voice of Herr Feltz taking the lead. The most distinctive voice was that of Mitri as he intoned the Latin of the Mass and joined in a rousing rendition of ‘*Gloria in Excelsis Deo.*’ He was home at last, and he was experiencing the unique joy bestowed upon those rare individuals who have given up everything in order to carry the Good News of redemption into the wilderness.”

Prayer For Father Gallitzin's Intercession

O God, light of the faithful and shepherd of souls, who sent Servant of God Demetrius Gallitzin to serve God's people in the Allegheny Mountains, feeding your sheep by his words and forming them by his example, pour out your Spirit to sow seeds of truth in people's hearts and to awaken in them obedience to the faith.

May the Gospel continue to be preached and the Sacraments bring power and grace to the faithful. By the example of this man of faith, Demetrius Gallitzin, may your people advance in the path of salvation and love.

Confident of your faithfulness to us, we humbly ask you, our God, to grant us the favor of (name your intention).

May Christ's saving work continue to the end of the ages, and may we feel a more urgent call to work for the salvation of every creature. We pray this, as did your priest Demetrius Gallitzin, through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

+ + +

Kindly send information about favors granted to:

**The Cause for the Servant of God
Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin
Diocese Of Altoona - Johnstown
927 South Logan Boulevard
Hollidaysburg PA 16648**

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Word of Life



The Pope Teaches

By Pope Francis
Christmas Warms Hearts

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Christmas joy expressed through music brings a message of peace and brotherhood for those most in need, Pope Francis said.

Meeting with organizers and artists participating in a benefit Christmas concert at the Vatican, the pope said the talents of musicians and artists during the festive season "is a formidable way to open the doors of the mind and heart to the true meaning of Christmas."

"Christmas is a heartfelt feast, participatory, capable of warming the coldest hearts, of removing the walls of indifference toward one's neighbor, of encouraging openness toward the other and giving freely," he said Dec. 15.

The proceeds of the Dec. 16 concert, which is sponsored by the Pontifical Congregation for Catholic Education, were donated to two organizations -- Scholas Occurrentes and the "Don Bosco in the World" Foundation -- to benefit children's programs in Argentina and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The pope thanked the artists and the event organizers for donating their time and talents to "the needs of the needy and disadvantaged who beg for help and solidarity" and for promoting peace and compassion through music.

Pope Francis said he hoped the concert would be "an occasion to sow tenderness -- this word that is often forgotten today. Violence, war, no! Tenderness! That it may sow tenderness, peace and hospitality which flows from the grotto in Bethlehem," the pope said.

Among the international cast of musicians meeting the pope and performing at the concert were Annie Lennox and Patti Smith.



CNS Photo/L'Osservatore Romano

CONCERT: Pope Francis poses with children from the Piccolo Coro di Piazza Vittorio who sang during his Dec. 15 audience with an international group of singers and musicians who performed at a benefit concert at the Vatican.



ONE MORE TIME: A 2001 directory published by Saint Andrew Parish, Johnstown, included this photo of parish children presenting a nativity play.

Christmas in Rome is not exactly what one might imagine.

In the few decades since I lived in Italy, that red-suited globalist Santa Claus has been growing market share. St. Nicholas and his Italian avatar called La Befana have been receding in the national consciousness.

Rome's Piazza Navona used to be filled with stalls selling all the figurines and set pieces for fantastic "presepios" (Nativity scenes): waterfalls and butter churns, animals of all sorts and a host of townspeople. A few years ago, I saw stalls that sold Santa Claus on a Harley-Davidson. This year, no stalls at all, thanks to some mysterious incompetency on the part of City Hall.

Christmas trees, once a rarity, are more common. I saw a fake Christmas tree in a Vatican office.

It would be easy to grow cynical about what has become of Christmas, even in the land that gave us the Christmas creche. (Thank you, St. Francis.) A good friend of mine in the Catholic press who has heard me natter about this tells me to put a sock in it. He says we should enjoy the moments of family and the traditions and not get too agitated about the materialistic excesses.

I once thought that all Catholics should adopt the Eastern



Amid The Fray

By Greg Erlandson
Italian Christmas:
Et Tu, Santa?

churches' approach and mark Epiphany as the time of gift-giving (after all, that's what the three kings were doing).

We would celebrate Christmas with Mass and a wonderful meal with our family. We would mark the 12 days of Christmas with lights and carols, and then on the 12th day, Jan. 6 (not the movable feast we now have), the family would exchange presents. This act of rebellion would have the additional benefit, I thought, of allowing us to take advantage of the after-Christmas sales.

Of course, focusing on potential sales contradicts all my high-minded impulses for less materialism!

Like Advent in Rome, Christmas is imperfectly remembered in our society. But maybe my friend is right. We can't control what Walmart or Amazon do. We can't go around demanding that no one wishes us "Happy Holidays."

Instead, we can simply strive to remember that God so loved

the world that he gave us his only Son, allowing him to experience the vulnerability of birth and the ignominy of a cruel death for our sake.

And however stressed we become in our quest for the perfect gift, however anxious about the Christmas dinner and the marketing-driven staging of our Christmas decorations, we can redeem it all.

This Christmas, read the Nativity passages to each other before bedtime or in front of the Christmas tree. Kneel in prayer before the manger in your church. Look up at the crisp night sky where the shepherds saw the angelic host two millennia ago and whisper a prayer of gratitude. Give thanks for the ability to give and receive presents, and pray for those who are unable to.

That's all it takes to recover the Christmas spirit.

Even Santa on a Harley can't ruin that.



Question Corner

By Father Kenneth Doyle
Fasting And
Holy Communion

Q. I enjoy reading your columns in our diocesan newspaper. Recently you responded to a person who is concerned about missing Mass due to agoraphobia. (Editor's note: Agoraphobia is defined as an extreme or irrational fear of crowded spaces or enclosed public places.)

As a psychiatrist, I wish you would have added that agoraphobia is a very treatable condition, using medication or a specific kind of therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which can help a person manage anxiety in public settings such as Mass. In addition to discussing the situation with a priest, the person who wrote may seek treatment with a doctor or a therapist with skills in CBT.

(Since the writer is seeking to participate more fully in worship and the sacraments, I have to believe that God will smile on the work he or she does with a medical professional to achieve that!) (Columbus, Ohio)

Q. I was delighted to read your column about agoraphobia. It is nice to know that you are not alone, that others are dealing with similar issues. I have panic/anxiety problems and, when I told a deacon that I was unable to attend weekend Masses because of the large number of people present, he suggested that I attend Mass instead on a weekday. (Actually, I now go on more than one weekday!)

It is a great relief to feel comfortable while praying at Mass and not have to focus on fighting feelings of panic. Thank you for addressing this, and I am sure it will help others as well. (City of origin withheld.)

A. The two letters above are indicative of the responses that are received daily, commenting on this column. Often enough, these comments contain additional information that may be helpful to some readers.

Here, the first letter serves as an important reminder that God works in many ways -- of-

ten through the efforts of skilled professionals. When medical help is available, one is wise and well-advised to seek it. The second letter may be of comfort simply by assuring readers that they are never alone in dealing with particular challenges.

Q. Both my daughter and I left the church some years back, although for different reasons. I returned to regular practice about a year and a half ago, and my daughter is thinking of returning as well.

She is a single mom, with two children -- ages 6 and 12 -- and she would like them to be baptized. (I have been trying to teach them about the Catholic faith.)

Our problem is that we have no other family, and our friends are not Catholic. Is it possible that I can be their godmother, even though I am also their grandmother? (Taylorsville, Kentucky)

A. I am delighted to hear of your return to the sacramental practice of the Catholic faith and to the support this offers you in living the Christian life. Note, too, the "multiplier effect" -- I can only believe that your own journey back has served as an example for your daughter, and now her two children will be raised as Catholics as well!

In answer to your question, yes -- you yourself may certainly be the sponsor (godparent) for your grandchildren's baptisms. A father or mother may not serve as a godparent for their own child (Canon 874 of the church's Code of Canon Law), but there is no such rule prohibiting grandparents. The role of the sponsor is to "help the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it," and I am sure you would do this well (Canon 872).

Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12203.



For The Journey

By Effie Caldarola
'A Combo Burger
Of Absolute Hilarity & Joy'

I blame Jesuit Father Greg Boyle for the fact that people sitting around me on an airplane a few years ago suspected I might be nuts.

I was reading Boyle's book, **Tattoos On The Heart**, about his ministry with gang members in Los Angeles. Father Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries, a project that employs gang members, gives them marketable skills, and loves them and believes in them.

Father Boyle's book is a memoir of his kinship with his "homies," the many funerals at which he has officiated -- people he loved killing people he loved -- and the deep friendships he's made. He speaks tellingly of the incredibly troubled childhoods of the gang members he meets.

As I read, I found myself sniffing and wiping tears. Alternately, Father Boyle's sense of humor, and the humor he finds in his gang members, is hilarious. And his delivery is perfect. Suddenly, midflight, I would burst out laughing, tears still damp on my tissue.

People started to glance at me. I tried to be reserved, but **Tattoos** did me in. Instead of trying to stifle my emotions, I should have held up the book and proclaimed, "Buy this book. It will change you."

Recently, I heard Krista Tippett's interview of Father Boyle on her program "On Being," which airs on National Public Radio. He has a new book out, **Barking To The Choir**. As usual, humor plays a key role in his speaking and writing.

I was delighted to hear how Father Boyle described being attracted to the Jesuits as a young man protesting the Vietnam War.

"They were a combo burger of absolute hilarity and joy," he told Tippett -- and "they were prophetic."

Someone asked me to write a reflection on Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent. "Gaudete" means, literally, rejoice, and so I considered the subject of joy. I realized that like many people, I sometimes think of joy as an "if" and "when" proposition. Maybe, I wrote, when North Korea comes to the negotiating table, or if our loved one is cured, or we lose that last 10 pounds, we'll find joy.

But those life goals aren't the source of joy. Jesus is the source of joy. St. Paul tells us, "The one who calls you is faithful." That's cause for joy.

Pope Francis speaks of the necessity of joy. "There is no Christian without joy," he said in a homily last year. Joy through adversity is what separates the person of faith from those who can't see beyond this world's problems and darkness.

I know many activists, people engaged in great work for social justice and good causes. I've noticed that the ones who survive the longest, and do the best work, also have the best sense of humor. Not humor that grows from sarcasm or anger, but humor that grows from joy, a delight in others and a faith in the transcendent.

They're the ones -- the prophetic ones -- who believe that ultimately God's justice will prevail even if it seems bleak right now.

When we are tempted to let the world's problems get us down, or when we feel defeated in the work we do, it's time to pray, but also time to laugh. Laughter, like a meal, is best shared with others.

St. Ignatius, who founded the Jesuits, said we can find God in all things. Tough as it might be, we can also find joy -- and often some humor -- in all situations. Call it a combo burger, if you will, but faith and joy go hand in hand.

Saint Stephen
1st Century
Feast - December 26



Christianity's first martyr was probably a Greek Jew. Stephen's story is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. He was among the first seven deacons chosen to serve the Hellenist Christian community in Jerusalem. But the wonders he worked rattled local Jewish leaders. Witnesses at his trial before the Sanhedrin gave false testimony, and Stephen defended himself with a stirring speech recalling the long history of Israel's relationship with God and calling the Jews "stiff-necked people" who "always oppose the Holy Spirit." As he was stoned to death outside the city, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He is the patron of bricklayers, stonemasons and numerous individual Christian churches.

'Crowning Jewel,' Of National Shrine Basilica, The Trinity Dome, Dedicated December 8

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The overflowing congregation at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception hardly needed reminding to raise their "eyes to the heavens" during a dedication of the Trinity Dome Mosaic Dec. 8.

Before Mass began, all eyes were already on the newly completed gold dome above the front central section of the Upper Church.

When it was blessed during Mass, incense rose above the congregation and bright lights were turned on to give a better view of the newly finished dome that includes the words of the Nicene Creed encircling the base and a depiction of the Holy Trinity, Mary, the four Evangelists, angels and more than a dozen saints connected to the United States or the shrine.

During the blessing and before and after Mass, phones and cameras were held aloft to capture the completed work more

than two years in the making. But it would take more than a few pictures to capture the details in this majestic work of art described as the "crowning jewel" of the national shrine during introductory remarks by Msgr. Walter Rossi, the rector.

The dome mosaic is composed of more than 14 million pieces of Venetian glass covering more than 18,300 square feet of the dome's surface. Its completion marks the final step in finishing the work of the Upper Church that began in 1955.

The dome was dedicated, fittingly, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, reflecting the basilica's namesake. The dedication Mass was celebrated by Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl and Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, who was named by Pope Francis to be his special envoy at the dedication Mass.

Other cardinals concelebrating the Mass included Cardinals Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington and Justin Rigali, retired archbishop of Philadelphia, along with Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. They were joined by more than two dozen bishops and 90 priests.

Cardinal Wuerl pointed out in his homily that the mosaic tiles in the dome are symbolic of the living body of Christ regularly filling the pews of the shrine and reflecting the church's diversity.



THE HOLY TRINITY

CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn



MARY, THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn

He urged the congregation of families, women religious, students and people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds who filled the pews, the side chapels and stood in the back at the dedication Mass to always look to

this "great majestic dome mindful of our prayer to Mary" and ask for her intercession.

He said Mary is the model of "what our faith should be" because she believed that nothing was impossible with God.

(Continued On Page 11.)

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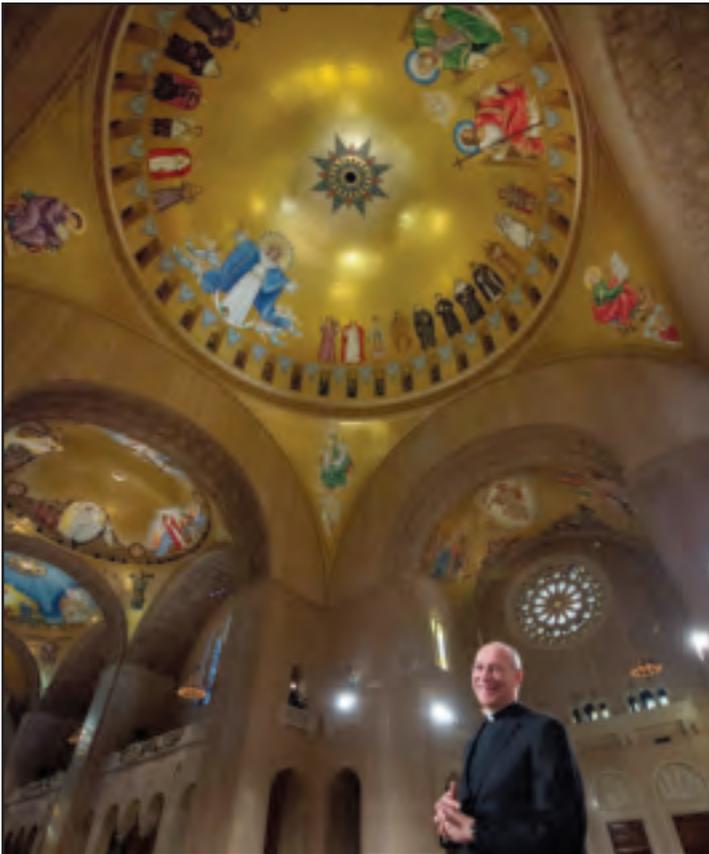
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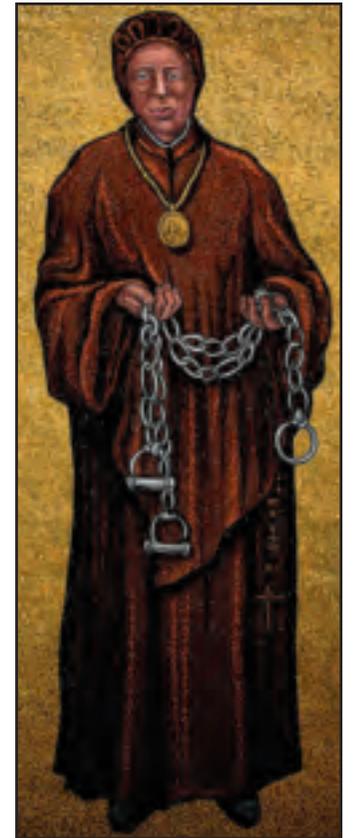
RECTOR: Msgr. Walter Rossi, rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, is pictured in a Dec. 1 photo. Msgr. Rossi said it was inspiring to see the work on the new Trinity Dome Mosaic progress, just as it is inspiring to witness the faith of the people who come to pray at the national shrine every day. The dome was dedicated December 8.



SAINT JUAN DIEGO



SAINT LORENZO RUIZ



CNS Photos/Tyler Orsburn

SAINT JOSEPHINE

Rector Calls Trinity Dome Work Of Art, Work Of Faith

Dome Is ‘Crowning Jewel’

(Continued From Page 10.)

The cardinal said he remembered coming to the shrine when he was a student at The Catholic University of America in the 1960s when the walls were simply brick except for the mosaic image of the Risen Christ at the front of the church.

He also noted that the completion of the dome finishes a work that began nearly 100 years ago when the shrine’s cornerstone was placed in 1920.

As construction began on the National Shrine, as it was then called, Catholics across the country were invited to contribute however they could. Some donated pieces of gold jewelry and even precious stones, the cardinal said, which were fashioned into what came to be known as the “first chalice of the National Shrine” and was used at the Dec. 8 mosaic dedication.

When Pope Francis was at

the shrine in 2015 to celebrate Mass and canonize St. Junipero Serra, he also blessed a piece of the mosaic: the words for the beginning and end of the Nicene Creed: “I believe in one God” and “Amen.”

At the end of the dedication Mass, Msgr. Rossi thanked the artists and workers, some of whom were seated at the front of the church, for their work on the mosaic, which was done in Italy and shipped in 30,000 sections weighing 24 tons. He pointed out that no one was injured and no damages occurred in the installation.

He also thanked the many donors who contributed to the dome work and gave to the shrine’s one-time national collection for the project on Mother’s Day.

“This crowning jewel of Mary’s shrine is really your work, your gift to the Blessed Mother,” he said.

By Mark Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- In the years since its 1959 dedication, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception has had three main architectural focal points: on the exterior, its Great Dome and Knights Tower over the northeast Washington skyline, and in the interior, its dramatic Christ in Majesty Mosaic behind the main altar.

With the Dec. 8 dedication of its interior Trinity Dome Mosaic completing its original architectural and iconographic plans, the national shrine has a new dramatic focal point, before it marks the centennial of the laying of its foundation stone in 2020.

And Msgr. Walter Rossi, the national shrine’s rector, said in an interview that it is fitting that the Trinity Dome is centrally located in the nation’s largest Catholic church, and that

the Holy Trinity is central to the new mosaic’s iconography.

“The Trinity is central to the mosaic, because the Trinity is central to our Christian life and faith. This is how God has revealed himself to us as Father, Son and Spirit,” Msgr. Rossi told the **Catholic Standard**, newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese.

Opposite the monumental figures of the Trinity in the mosaic is a nearly three-story high depiction of Mary as the Immaculate Conception, appearing as a beautiful young woman, her arms extended toward a procession of saints and holy people, ultimately pointing to her son Jesus.

“Mary’s arms are outstretched to embrace us, just as the arms of Jesus in Christ in

Majesty are outstretched to embrace us,” the rector said.

He noted that those two main parts of the Trinity Dome Mosaic are based on 1953 designs by the shrine’s iconography committee as plans were underway to complete the Great Upper Church.

“We altered the figures on the east and west sides to include saints of the United States, and saints who had a history with the national shrine, like Mother Teresa and St. John Paul II, and we also wanted saints that reflect the face of the people who come here,” said Msgr. Rossi.

(Continued On Page 12.)

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SAINT FRANCES CABRINI

CNS Photos/Tyler Orsburn

Shrine's Trinity Dome Reflective Of Faith Of Pilgrims

(Continued From page 11.)

That procession of saints reflects the diversity of the nearly 1 million pilgrims from across the United States and from around the world who come to pray at the basilica each year.

"This without question is the most diverse Catholic church in the United States," the National Shrine's rector said, noting that is why the saints in the mosaic include St. Juan Diego from Mexico, St. Lorenzo Ruiz from the Philippines, St. Josephine Bakhita from Sudan in Africa, and St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American to be recognized as a saint.

Those holy people depicted in the mosaic include St. John Paul II, who in 1979 became the first pope to visit the National Shrine, where he prayed in the Our Lady of Czestochowa Chapel and addressed a gathering of women religious. Also pictured is St. Teresa of Kolkata, who visited and prayed at the basilica many times over the years.

The saint in the mosaic with the most recent connection to the national shrine is St. Junipe-



CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn
SAINT JOHN XXIII

ro Serra, the noted 18th-century Spanish Franciscan missionary of California who was canonized in 2015 by Pope Francis during a Mass celebrated outside the

shrine, the first canonization ceremony held in the United States.

In addition to St. John Paul II, the saints in the mosaic include two other popes: St. John XXIII, who was pontiff when the national shrine was dedicated in 1959, and Blessed Paul VI, who visited the shrine one year later as a cardinal. The Nicene Creed encircles the base of the Trinity Dome.



CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn
SAINT KATERI



CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn
BLESSED PAUL VI

The Trinity Dome Mosaic's figures, symbols and words all together offer a visual representation of the Catholic faith, the priest said.

"That's what religious art is meant to be, a catechism. ... Looking at religious art, people learn about the Gospel message, the lives of the saints and salvation history," he said.

Msgr. Rossi, 56, is in his 20th year at the national shrine. The priest of the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, was named rector in 2005. Before that, he was director of pilgrimages there for eight years.

He said what inspires him most at the national shrine is witnessing the faith of the people who come to pray and worship God there.

When asked what impact he hopes that the Trinity Dome Mosaic will have on visitors, he said: "As you look up and see the images of the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin Mary, you cannot but be reminded that the goal of our life on earth is our life with God, that heaven is our final goal, to rejoice forever with Mary in a hymn of praise to the blessed Trinity, and then we have the saints whose lives and example direct us on our way. Everybody's life is a pilgrimage to the Father."

Italian Mosaic Artists' Dream Realized

With Completion Of Shrine's Trinity Dome

By Kelly Sankowski
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Giovanni Trivisanutto's mosaic career began when he was an 11-year-old boy standing on a step stool to reach the workbench at the mosaic school in Spilimbergo, Italy.

It ended with him once again reaching new heights as he stood atop scaffolding 150 feet up, installing the mosaic section that would complete both his career and the original plans for the Trinity Dome in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

As he sat in the pews of the shrine's Great Upper Church Dec. 7, looking up at the 18,300-square-foot mosaic, the founder of the Italian studio that completed the dome artwork recalled how he entered the mosaic craft because he had no other choice.

In the aftermath of World War II, Trivisanutto's hometown of Spilimbergo, northeast of Venice, was destroyed. The only school remaining was the Scuola di Mosaico, where people from around the world are trained in the mosaic craft. When Trivisanutto completed elementary school, he began classes there.

Because of his short height, Trivisanutto had to pull up a block on which to stand so he could work. At first, he was discouraged from doing the work and took a brief break from classes. He soon returned and eventually graduated, thanks to the help of "a special teacher" who "understood he had to do something to make me on the right track, and he did it," Trivisanutto said.

That teacher, now 107 years old, came in his wheelchair to the large warehouse where Trivisanutto, his son Fabrizio and other workers were completing the mosaic. The father-son team had rented space separate from their



CNS Photo/Paul Haring

ARTISTS: Giovanni Trivisanutto, founder of Trivisanutto Giovanni mosaic studio, and his son, Fabrizio, pose in 2016 at their shop in Spilimbergo, Italy. They stand next to an artistic rendering of the mosaic design for the central dome of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

studio because the mosaic was so large, with the image of Mary reaching more than 31 feet tall by 33 feet wide.

Trivisanutto's studio, Trivisanutto Giovanni, which he founded in 1980, also completed the mosaics for the national shrine's Knights of Columbus Incarnation Dome, Redemption Dome, and Italian and Hungarian chapels. Trivisanutto said every time he visited, he would look at the Trinity Dome and think it would be impossible to install a mosaic there.

"This one was just a dream," he said. "We said this would never happen."

When he received a call from Msgr. Walter Rossi, rector of the national shrine, in September 2015, telling him that they wanted his studio to make the Trinity Dome Mosaic, Trivisanutto said he was happy at first, but that he soon thought, "Oh gee, what do we do now?"

His team had the same amount of time to work on the Trinity Dome as it did for the other two domes, but it was five times larger.

The Trivisanuttos needed more than the usual 10 workers to complete such a large project in so little time, so mosaic workers from different workshops in Spilimbergo -- known as "town of mosaics" -- joined the effort. From March 2016 until April

2017, the team worked for 10 hours a day, six days a week.

"You are not allowed to be sick. And no vacation," Trivisanutto said. "Otherwise, we would never finish."

Despite the grueling schedule, Trivisanutto said every-

one was excited to work on the project. Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl visited the workshop at one point. He went around to each workbench, placing a stone in each section that was being worked on.

The mosaic process began with color drawings to scale, which the studio then blew up to the actual size that would be placed in the dome. After the designer approved the larger drawings, workers cut the paper into 30,000 sections, which were then numbered to correspond with thousands of color shades.

Each part of the mosaic has precise coloring. For example, the blue garment worn by St. Mark the Evangelist has at least 20 different shades of blue in it, and each person's face has about 30 different shadings.

The entire mosaic is made up of more than 14 million pieces of Venetian glass, called "tesserae," which the workers hand cut with a hammer to create the right size for the design. For shipping, the pieces filled 60 crates.

Trivisanutto sent three workers to Washington for the installation, and hired three more locally.

"When we decorate the church, you feel that you do something for your religion, for your people, for the future of your religion," Trivisanutto said.

On June 16, Trivisanutto joined Cardinal Wuerl and Msgr. Rossi as the last section of the mosaic was set in place. With the project now completed, Trivisanutto, who will turn 80 soon, said he will still stop by the mosaic studio at times to greet the workers, but he trusts his son, who now runs the company, to take over the work.

"For me, (learning we would make the mosaic) was the best news I had because I knew I would finish with this one," he said. "This is a nice way to finish. ... It is a dream that came true."



CNS Photo/Tyler Orsburn

SAINT JOHN PAUL II: Mosaic tiles depicting a choir angel and Saint John Paul II are seen in the Trinity Dome at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. The mosaic was dedicated December 8.

Now Showing

Festive Holiday Fare, 'The Star' Shines Bright

By John Mulderig
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) -- A holiday treat suitable for all but the tiniest, "The Star" (Sony) is a delightful animated version of the Christmas story told from the perspective of some of the animals present in the manger.

Director Timothy Reckart and screenwriter Carlos Kotkin skillfully balance religious themes such as the importance of prayer and the value of forgiveness with a more secular message about pursuing your dreams. They also throw in a healthy dose of straightforward entertainment.

They work their way into the biblical narrative of Jesus' birth through the adventures of a gentle donkey from Nazareth named Bo (voice of Steven Yeun). Curious about the world beyond the grain mill where he carries out his monotonous work, Bo yearns to exchange his life of drudgery for the fame and prestige to be gained by joining the storied royal caravan.

Bo's best friend, a lively dove by the name of Dave (voice of Keegan-Michael Key), shares this ambition. And the pals get their chance to fulfill their aspirations when Bo successfully escapes his confinement, though he injures his leg in the process.

Bo is tended to by no one less than Mary (voice of Gina



CNS Photo/Sony Pictures

THE STAR: Animated characters appear in the movie "The Star." The Catholic News Service classification is A-I, general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG, parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

Rodriguez), after which his quest takes a detour. Despite the mild disapproval of Joseph (voice of Zachary Levi), Mary adopts her patient as a pet. Bo, in turn, becomes dedicated to protecting the parents-to-be, as they journey to Bethlehem, from the murderous scheming of King Herod (voice of Christopher Plummer).

Bo is aided in this endeavor not only by Dave but, eventually, by an affectionate sheep called Ruth (voice of Aidy Bryant) whom the pals encounter along the way. Together, the critters do what they can to thwart the unspeaking hulk of a soldier Herod has dispatched to slaughter the Holy Family and the pair of ferocious-seeming but not entirely evil dogs, Thaddeus

(voice of Ving Rhames) and Rufus (voice of Gabriel Iglesias), accompanying him.

As a range of characters rely on prayer for guidance and strive to do God's will, Mary and Joseph present the image of a well-balanced marriage by being strong for each other in moments of trial or doubt. Though some liberties are taken with the scriptural account -- Catholic viewers will especially notice the absence of the phrase "Hail, Mary" from the Annunciation scene -- overall, the script is faithful to the Gospels.

The inclusion of light-hearted humor, moreover, does nothing to detract from the appropriately reverent treatment

of the movie's sacred subject matter. Though a couple of silly guano-themed lines designed to make little ones giggle might have been dispensed with, overall this is a very solid choice for family viewing. All the more so, as it may serve as the starting point for a discussion of faith in general and of the Incarnation in particular.

The film contains scenes of peril and a bit of very mild scatological humor. The Catholic News Service classification is A-I -- general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG -- parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

Coming Up On 'Proclaim!'

Upcoming guests on "Keeping The Faith," Bishop Mark L. Bartchak's segment of "Proclaim!" will include:

December 31 - - On this Feast of the Holy Family, the Lieb family from Holy Name Parish in Ebensburg joins the Bishop to discuss the importance of family life.

January 7, 2018 - - Bishop Mark welcomes Jude Glover of Saint Peter School in Somerset as part of his Student Spotlight series.

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As Pope Turns 81, Kids Entertain Him With Song, Dance And 13 - Foot Pizza

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Celebrating his 81st birthday, Pope Francis blew out the candles on a 13-foot long pizza after being serenaded with song and dance by children and employees from a Vatican pediatric clinic.

A group of children receiving assistance from the Vatican's St. Martha Dispensary, a maternal and pediatric clinic, had given the pope a birthday party Dec. 17 marked with singing, dancing and a cake adorned with gold and white fondant decorations.

They also rolled out a large pizza with a single lit candle on it. The pope was joined with several children from the clinic and counted down before blowing out the candle.

"Eat the 4-meter pizza: Eat well, it will do you good and make you grow," the pope told the children.

The pope said their joy was a gift and is like "good earth that makes life grow with good fruits."

"Do not make children sad. When children see that there are problems at home, that their parents are fighting, they suffer," he said. "They must always grow with joy."

After meeting the children, Pope Francis greeted an estimated 25,000 pilgrims in St. Peter's Square for his Sunday Angelus address.

After reciting the Angelus prayer, the pope was about to greet several individual groups present in the square before the crowd burst into song, singing "Happy Birthday."

Touched by the gesture, the pope said: "Thank you. Thank you very much."

Celebrating the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, Pope Francis invited Christians to prepare for Christ's coming through "constant joy, persever-



CNS Photo/L'Osservatore Romano

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION: Pope Francis blows out a candle on a 13-foot-long pizza during a special meeting to celebrate his 81st birthday Dec. 17 at the Vatican's Paul VI Hall.

ing prayer and continual thanksgiving."

"Joy, prayer and gratitude are the three attitudes that prepare us to live Christmas in an authentic way," the pope said before inviting the crowd to repeat the words: "Joy, prayer and gratitude."

Pope Francis also blessed the statues of baby Jesus that will be at the center of Nativity scenes in Rome schools, churches and homes.

Addressing the children who brought their figurines to the square, the pope said, "When you pray at home, in front of the creche with your family, let yourselves be drawn toward the tenderness of the child Jesus, who was born poor and fragile in our midst to give us his love. This is the true Christmas."

With Christmas also around the corner, the pope also met with members of the Italian branch of Catholic Action's children's section, parish-based groups of young people, ages 4-14, for his traditional pre-Christmas audience with them.

The pope said the Christmas season is a reminder of helping those in need who are the "image of the child Jesus who was turned away and who did not find a place to stay in the city of Bethlehem."

He called on them to ask themselves how they can better serve the suffering Christ in those who are cast aside by society.

"Here are your 'peripheries;' try to fix your goal on companions and people that no one sees, and dare to make the first

step to meet them, to give them a bit of your time, a smile, a gesture of tenderness," the pope said.

"In this upcoming feast of

holy Christmas, you are called to always make him known more and more among your friends, in the cities, in the parishes and in your families," he said.

*A holy day has
dawned upon us.
Come, you nations,
and adore the Lord.
For today a great light
has come upon the earth.*



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Many Partners Help Catholic Charities Make Christmas Brighter For Families In Need



**Photo And Text
By Bruce A. Tomaselli**

As far as the staff at Catholic Charities can recall, their Annual Christmas Drive to help families in need had been going on for decades before they arrived at the social service office.

"It's a very ecumenical program," said Jean Johnstone, executive director. "We get donations from all religious denominations along with businesses and private individuals."

The Bellefonte Office and the Johnstown Office conduct the same program.

This year, the Altoona Office will have been able to sponsor an entire Christmas for 45 families and 106 children up to 18 - years - of - age.

Said Administrative Assistant, Joshua Hershberger, who coordinates the program, "We get families that have been recommended by social workers through our and other agencies. One of those other agency's is The United Way," he said.

The sponsoring persons and businesses provide presents for each family member. There are also cash donations, which are divided equally among the 45 families, to help with heating bills.

Johnstone said, "Our Johnstown Office adopts children from the Domestic Abuse Office and

the Children and Youth Services. Their Christmases were greatly aided through collections at Ebensburg Bishop Carroll Catholic High School, and Johnstown Bishop McCort Catholic High School."

Altoona Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic High School collected nearly two rooms full of gifts. In addition, around Thanksgiving, the students hold The Pope Francis Challenge, in which they collect nonperishable food items. They are then donated to the Altoona Catholic Charities Office.

The Bellefonte Office also received a good effort from Our Lady of Victory Parish in State College, and Saint John The Evangelist Parish in Bellefonte. Their efforts made a Merry Christmas for many families.

Hershberger enjoys this time of the year. He says he looks forward to it each year. "Around the Catholic Charities Office he's known as 'Mr. Christmas'", laughed Johnstone.

Johnstone said they were able satisfy some special needs families this year. Sponsors tailored their purchases to address them. Johnstone said that in addition to the gifts, each family received a gift card earmarked for their favorites stores.

Bishop Mark L. Bartchak, as he does every year, spent some time at Catholic Charities to help unload the cars with the gifts donated by the sponsors.

"I think this is Catholic Charities at its best," said Bishop Mark to



CHRISTMAS GIFTS: Bishop Mark L. Bartchak helps Jean Johnstone, executive director of Catholic Charities, sort Christmas gifts for families in need at the agency's Altoona office.

Johnstone. "Thanks for all of your good work."

As the sponsors provide an entire Christmas for these families, it goes a long way in lessening the burdens that some carry during the holidays. "Maybe a father or mother

got laid off and must make a gut-wrenching decision to heat their homes or buy their children gifts," said Hershberger.

"That shouldn't be the kind of lesson a kid has to learn at such an early age," Josh lamented. As each

Christmas Season arrives, He said he always feels a great joy. "The sponsors and clients always greet me with smiling faces. "There's nothing better than seeing the smiles on the faces of the young children as they receive their gifts."

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