

**For The Bulletin Of
31 January 2021**



**THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN
WINTER'S ORDINARY TIME**

From Father Robert

We are all formerly students for some time in our lives, and it is best to remain informal students throughout our lives, for there is no point at which there is not something we can learn. At the same time, most of us function as teachers at many points in our lives, some of us professional but most of us casually, guiding and directing people in ways that might even escape us. We teach by how we live, how we treat people, how we respond under stress, how we reprimand others, how we help a neighbor, as well as by more concrete and direct ways of teaching.

Some of us, by training and vocation, teach religion and theology, and it is those of us engaged in this profession who must always remain students in our area of expertise, for Jesus says “you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have but one Father, the One in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have but one instructor, the Messiah” (Matthew 23:8-10). This

teaching is directed at all Christians, but it is a difficult teaching for those called upon to be teachers and instructors, for it is easy to forget that in the things of God we are always students.

It is telling, and especially humbling for biblical scholars, to remember that Jesus did not choose His apostles from among the biblical interpreters or experts in Jewish Halakah (roughly equivalent to canon lawyers today) but from among the fishermen. How could fishermen be teachers in the Bible and Jewish law when they had not been formally trained? What did they know that the experts did not? What the fishermen knew, or were willing to encounter, was the only true subject: God. The unschooled fishermen knew Jesus, spent time with Jesus, and were willing to learn from Jesus what they did not know. It was not technical expertise that Jesus sought in His apostles but the willingness to encounter the word of God as Life-changing and life-giving.

It was the encounter with truth that led the students, the crowds of ordinary people in Galilee, Judea, and elsewhere, to throng around the teacher, Jesus, they responded as people hungry to learn the deepest reality about God and themselves. So, “on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at His teaching for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.” The religious experts, the scribes, are mentioned, though it seems they are not present, as a contrast to Jesus’ authority. Perhaps the experts hung back, wary of How Jesus’ teaching might affect their livelihood or authority, or because they disagreed that Jesus’ authority was grounded in the Scriptures of God.

Yet, Jesus' final act in the Capernaum synagogue is the demonstration of the divine ground of His teaching authority, for "in their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, 'What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!'" Jesus healed the man of the unclean spirit, and the people were again "amazed," referring to this action of Jesus as a "teaching": "They asked one another, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority.'" It is God's presence and power that is the lesson not only to learn but to encounter.

It is necessary to have teachers in all areas of knowledge, and this includes theology and biblical studies. Expertise and properly ordered authority are essential for all fields. But ultimately, we are all students of the one teacher whose authority is ordered to our salvation and joy. From this school we never graduate; this teacher is always guiding us. This education is perfected for our final purpose: to know God.



Questions for further reflection and meditation on today's scriptures:

In the first reading God promises to raise up a prophet to speak His words to the people. Who are our modern-day prophets who call us to walk in the ways of the Lord?

The psalmist counsels, "If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." What

message is God inviting you to be open to today?

St. Paul urges the Corinthians to be free of anxieties and distractions. What spiritual practices help you to be firmly centered in God's peace?

In the gospel, we hear that the people of Capernaum "were astonished" at Jesus' teaching. What words of Jesus in the gospels do you find astonishing or even shocking?



About The Ambo: Altar of the Word

"The central focus of the area in which the Word of God is proclaimed during the liturgy is the ambo," it says in *Built of Living Stones* (61), and it is the place where "the Christian community encounters the Living Lord in the Word of God and prepares itself for the "breaking of the bread" and the mission to live the Word that will be proclaimed." It is the Altar of the Word, where Scripture is broken open and shared: the GIRM tells us "When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the church, God Himself speaks to His people, and Christ, present in His word, proclaims the Gospel" (29). While many of us are hopefully aware of the ambo's sacred purpose, it often becomes a place – owing to

its visibility and, frequently, its microphone - for many other verbal utterances. The ambo is meant to be used for its sacred purpose only.



The Annual Pastoral and Financial Report for 2020

Each year the Pastor is asked to present an Annual Pastoral and Financial Report to the parish. It is a wonderful opportunity to remember how God has been at work in us and our parish in everything we have done over the past year, to remember significant moments of grace and blessing, how lives have been transformed, sacraments celebrated, the challenges faced, and the growth that has taken place. It is also an opportunity to give an accounting of our Stewardship of Time, Talent, and Treasure in the building of the Kingdom here at St. Ignatius of Antioch. How grateful we are for the more than 800 registered households who have made our parish their spiritual home, offered themselves in service, ministry, and outreach, and who have supported so generously our programs, ministries, and outreaches through their tithes and offerings. What is significant and of note is that 2020 was marked by the pandemic of Covid-19 and how it affected all of us. The Pastoral portion of the Annual Report remembers moments month-by-month, lists our goals and objective for the coming year of 2021, and then provides the Financial portion which gives an accounting of our finances and budget for the previous year and presents the budget for 2021.

There is no question about your generosity and support for our parish – it is amazing! And we are deeply grateful. The Annual Report may be found online on our Facebook page, on our webpage, and will be available in hard copy for those who come for Walk-Up Communion this morning between 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Copies will also be available by request from the parish office. On behalf of all of us, I wish to thank **Maryann Peddicord**, Parish Secretary, **Estrella Rusk**, Financial Secretary, and **Brian McCoy** for all their work in preparing this year's Annual Report for publication. As required by Diocesan Statute, a copy is also sent to The Bishop and the Chief Financial Officer, Paul Bongiovani.



On Wednesday, January 13th, we received a notification from The Vatican that the experience of Ash Wednesday will be different this year due to the pandemic. I share with you the article from Catholic News Service as well as Bishop Barber: The Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments asked priests to take special anti-COVID-19 precautions this year when distributing ashes on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17, including sprinkling ashes on the top of people's heads rather than using them to make a cross on people's foreheads.

The congregation's note on the "distribution of ashes in time of pandemic" was published on the congregation's website Jan. 12 and directs priests to say "the prayer for blessing the ashes" and then sprinkle

"the ashes with holy water, without saying anything."

"Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: 'Repent and believe in the Gospel' or 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.'"

"The priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places," it said. "The priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything."

The usual practice would be to repeat the formula — "Repent and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" — to each person as the ashes are sprinkled on the top of their head or rubbed onto their forehead.

Sprinkling ashes on the top of people's heads, rather than marking foreheads with ashes, is the customary practice at the Vatican and in Italy. Given the spread of the coronavirus, the practice has the advantage of not requiring the priest to touch multiple people.

The Latin, Italian, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese versions of the note also specify that the mask should cover the priests' "nose and mouth."

Here at St. Ignatius of Antioch, Father Moses and I will administer the "Sprinkling of Ashes" on Wednesday, February 17th, as directed by The Vatican and Bishop Barber, at 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 12:00 Noon, 4:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. You are invited to Walk Up to the doors of the church where you will be greeted, sanitize your hands with

disinfectant, have your temperature taken, and then step forward to receive the sprinkling of ashes on your head. No words will be spoken. Once the ashes have been sprinkled on your head, you may turn and leave by the right main entrance door. Masks must be worn and social distancing observed at all times.

For the past 16 years, our Lenten Alms have been directed to our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg. We will once again do this in 2021. Envelopes will be available for your contribution or you may use the envelope provided in your envelope pack. Thank you for your Lenten sacrifices that will be expressed through your financial generosity to St. Peter Martyr and our support for Catholic Education.



The Governing Board of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County and our Social Justice Alliance grieve the violence, loss of life, and the loss of our sense of security as a nation after the events of January 6th in our Nation's Capitol Building. Our hearts grieve with the families of those who were hurt or killed. Our eyes and minds grieve at the memory of Americans turning on their elected leaders inside the Capitol Building with violence and vandalism. And our souls grieve that the politics of white grievance, egged on by falsehoods and outright lies, have become expressed in violent insurrection. On the day after the election of the first Black and Jewish persons as Senators in the state of Georgia there was an insurrection against our elected leaders inside our Capitol Building.

Many of us watched in helpless horror as the events occurred on our television screens. This attempt to stop the counting of the votes of all Americans certified by each and every state is an act of sedition and treason against all of our rights as Americans to have our votes counted each election. There are still elected leaders that support this insurrection. The history of peaceful transitions of power between elected Presidents of our representative Republic has been torn apart for the first time since our Constitution was instituted in 1789. Some fear that such actions may become normalized, but we must ensure that this aberration of American tradition remains just that.

The acts we watched reaffirmed the centrality of our need for truth in public discourse. We have seen how lies about election results have been used to turn Americans against each other. We watched as some of the security forces of our own Capitol Building gave deference to white people in very different ways than we saw them approach Black and Brown protesters just last spring – taking pictures with them, even allowing them to force their way past security to ransack offices, steal mail and shoot firearms near our nation’s elected leaders.

We call on all forms of media and social media forums to diligently present the fullest forms of reporting that are true to the best of their knowledge. For those areas of conflict, we call on our elected officials to restore the ‘fairness doctrine’ passed by Congress in 1949 (and revoked in 1987) to ensure the press addressed contrasting views of an issue to help teach us how we can hold the differing views of our neighbors with care and correction.

The violence of the few reminds us of the vision of the many. We have learned some things:

- The right to vote and free exercise thereof insures our future as a free people. The stranglehold of prejudice is breaking as more and more people are exercising their right and duty to vote.
- We are realizing how important it is to elect people with some sense of integrity. Never again can we elect a President whose rhetoric is inflammatory and whose behavior is threatening to the well-being of so many described as “minorities.” Decency, humility, and dedication to a cause greater than the self are crucial.
- No matter the political differences, we have a responsibility to recognize the dignity of everyone. We can no longer tolerate prejudice, inequality, and governmental indifference when peoples’ rights and dignity are compromised by self-seeking, greedy, insensitive governmental leaders.
- Finally, those charged with governmental power have a duty to act justly in the interest of all people. Political office should not and cannot be seen as a personal privilege for selfish and expedient advancement.

As America prepares for a new Administration, we pause to reflect on how precarious our American experiment is. Religious, cultural, and political leaders must always have the courage to speak out against the maleficence we have witnessed the last four years. This must never happen again. We pledge to move forward in our quest for a more just and equitable society.



FROM ASHES TO GLORY
A VIRTUAL LENTEN RETREAT
WITH DAN SCHUTTE

A VIRTUAL RETREAT WITH DAN SCHUTTE

Join Dan Schutte on a self-directed virtual Lenten retreat and make the journey from ashes to glory.

Includes:

Eighteen video presentations by Dan

Accessible from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday

Each presentation concludes with a song for prayer

Downloadable retreat workbook/journal

Retreat concludes with live ZOOM conversation with Dan

Consider giving a virtual retreat to a friend or loved one



I pray this retreat will be a time of hope and renewal you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Schutte".

Stay at home and make a Lenten retreat on your own time with eighteen music reflection videos by Dan Schutte. Access to the videos will last from Ash Wednesday through Palm Sunday. At the end of the retreat, you'll have the option to join a virtual Zoom conversation with Dan and others like yourself who've done the retreat. Registration includes a downloadable retreat workbook/journal to help you reflect on your experience and offer you a place to keep notes if you find that helpful

Registration fee is \$100 per person.

To register, go online to the National Catholic Reporter.



Email Scam

I wish to warn you that yet another phishing email scam making use of my parish email address was experienced by a number of parishioners and others outside the parish. The individual used a variation of my professional email address from the parish to seek donations of Gift Cards to “do me a favor.” I would never contact anyone in that way and the first clue that this attempt wasn’t from me was the use of a “gmail” account. If you receive any such request in the future, PLEASE DO NOT OPEN the email. It is definitely fraudulent. We contacted our IT technicians and they indicated that my email was NOT hijacked but that the hackers were making use of a variation of my name and parish email address to contact people in the hopes of getting them to purchase Gift Cards in very expensive amounts and then send the hacker the gift card codes to more quickly access the cash equivalents. Again, this is not from me and it is being experienced by other parishes and priests within our Diocese and beyond. If you have any questions about any emails from me, please contact the parish office immediately.

STATEMENT ON RACIAL JUSTICE

The Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, S.J.,
Bishop of Oakland, and the Diocese of
Oakland Task Force for Racial Justice
January 17, 2021

As stated by the Executive Committee of the
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2017:

Racism has rightly been called America's original sin. It remains a blot on our national life and continues to cause acts and attitudes of hatred, as recent events have made evident. The need to condemn, and combat, the demonic ideologies of white supremacy, neo-Nazism and racism has become especially urgent at this time. Our efforts must be constantly led and accompanied by prayer - but they must also include concrete action.

The killings of African American women and men over the past year have reinforced the need for all Americans to combat systematic oppression and racism. Voices raised as part of the Black Lives Matter discussions remind us that African Americans and other People of Color continue to be blighted by structural racism, lack of opportunity, health and wealth disparities, and direct violence committed by those who are responsible for our communities' wellbeing. We include sacred, secular, public and private structures.

The Diocese of Oakland acknowledges and recognizes that more must be done within this Diocese to address and end these inequities. Grounded by our belief in God and our knowledge that each of us was created by God and is loved by God, the Diocese of Oakland is committed to being a significant change agent in the fight for racial and social justice. While we strive to ensure that all people of color are granted the equal rights and privileges as our white sisters and brothers, given the long and specific history of oppression of African Americans in this country and within this Diocese, we begin this renewed commitment with an initial focus on the collective negative experiences of our African American sisters and brothers.

We further recognize and understand that racial and social justice is complex and

requires work. In the coming months, the Task Force will advise and assist Bishop Barber in the following areas:

- Education
- Pastoral Care
- Social Justice

“When we begin to separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons, when we start to see some people as “them” and others as “us”, we fail to love. Yet love is at the heart of Christian life.

“Racism is a moral problem that requires a moral remedy -- A Transformation of the Human Heart—that impels us to act” (source: [Open Wide Our Hearts](#). 20)

Dueling statements from US bishops, pope on Inauguration Day

21 January 2021

by [Christopher White](#)



President Joe Biden at the White House in Washington Jan. 20, after his inauguration as the 46th president of the United States. At right (CNS/Reuters/Tom Brenner)

The Vatican is more than 4,000 miles away from the White House, but on Wednesday it was much closer to the nation's second Catholic president than the leadership of the U.S. hierarchy.

As millions of viewers tuned into the inauguration Jan. 20, Joe Biden's Catholicism was on full display with a morning Mass; quotes from the pope, St. Augustine and Scripture during the ceremony; and a photo of Biden with Pope Francis in his newly outfitted Oval Office.

By the end of the day, however, that faith was under serious scrutiny by some stateside leaders of his own church.

As is the Vatican's custom, Francis sent a telegram to Biden congratulating him and urging him to pursue policies "marked by authentic justice and freedom." The statement, which encouraged Biden to work toward the common good, came two months after the [pope personally called](#) to congratulate him on his election win and after Francis [sent Biden](#) a signed copy of his new book.

By contrast, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, issued a 1,200-word [statement](#) offering his prayers for Biden but also outlining areas of policy disagreements, particularly on the issue of abortion, writing, "Our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils."

The statement went on to double-down on the U.S. bishops' stance that "abortion remains the 'preeminent priority'" of the bishops' conference, echoing language that was [adopted in 2019](#) ahead of the U.S. presidential election, [with the](#)

[justification](#) that the nation was on the heels of overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

"We cannot stay silent when nearly a million unborn lives are being cast aside in our country year after year through abortion," Gomez wrote in his Inauguration Day statement.

Gomez's statement was quickly endorsed and shared by a number of prelates, including San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, whose press officer sent out a statement under the headline "+Cordileone praises +Gomez: abortion is 'preeminent priority' " and the Knights of Columbus, which [described the statement](#) as "balanced and prophetic."

Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich, a close collaborator with Pope Francis, disagreed.

In a public rebuke of Gomez and the bishops' conference, Cupich [said the statement](#) was "ill-considered" and noted that there was no precedent for issuing one.

"The statement was crafted without the involvement of the Administrative Committee, a collegial consultation that is normal course for statements that represent and enjoy the considered endorsement of the American bishops," he said.

San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy also issued a statement saying that Francis offered a model for how the U.S. bishops should engage the new administration.

"Pope Francis' message to President Biden fundamentally speaks to him in his humanity, a man of Catholic faith striving to serve his nation and his God," wrote McElroy. "This is how we, the bishops of the United States, should encourage our new President: by entering into a relationship of

dialogue, not judgment; collaboration, not isolation; truth in charity, not harshness."

In Rome, a senior Vatican official told [America magazine](#) that Gomez' statement was "most unfortunate and is likely to create even greater divisions within the church in the United States."

Throughout Inauguration Day, many other bishops from around the country [issued statements](#), most offering prayers for the new president and the country. Catholic Charities, one of the country's largest charitable operations, also said it looks forward to working with the Biden administration.

As for Biden's new local pastor, Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory, no specific statement was issued; however when Biden arrived in the capital on Tuesday for his official event, Gregory was on hand to greet him. At a memorial service for the 400,000 Americans who have died during the pandemic, Gregory offered the invocation. Included in [his prayer](#): a plea for unity.



[Christopher White](#)

Christopher White is NCR national correspondent. His email address is cwhite@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: [@CWWhite212](#).

Catholic bishops split on how to deal with Biden

22 January 2021

by [Thomas Reese, Religion News Service](#), [The Associated Press](#)



Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, attends a press conference ahead of the summit on preventing clergy sex abuse at the Vatican on Feb. 18, 2019. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgias)

The American Catholic bishops are split over how to deal with Joe Biden, the first Catholic president since John F. Kennedy, but it's not just one split.

A small but vocal minority wants to punish the new president for his support of legalized abortion, gay rights and birth control. These are the bishops who consider Biden a bad Catholic who should not be allowed to go to Communion. But even the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, no liberal, thought this was a bad idea and told his priests not to play cop at the Communion rail.

A larger group of conservative bishops wants to avoid ecclesial penalties such as

denying Biden Communion, but still want to wage war on the Democrats because of their support for these issues. These are the bishops for whom abortion is the most important issue, trumping all other concerns. They believe that there is no room for compromise.

A minority of liberal bishops would like to downplay differences with the administration and instead work with it on social justice and peace issues.

On Inauguration Day, Pope Francis appeared to support this faction when he sent Biden a message that did not mention areas of disagreement. Rather, the pope prayed that God "guide your efforts to foster understanding, reconciliation and peace within the United States and among the nations of the world in order to advance the universal common good."

Such a message is not surprising. The Vatican diplomatic service is idealistic in its goals but realistic in its approach to nations, including the United States. It looks for areas of agreement where it can work with other governments rather than look for fights.

It's not always apparent, in part because everyone likes to see a fight. One U.S. ambassador to the Holy See described a meeting between a Democratic secretary of state and the Vatican where they spent almost all the time on areas of common interest. As they were walking out the door, the Vatican official said, "You know, of course, that in the press release we will have to mention our disagreement over abortion."

The media focused on this one sentence of the press release, not knowing that abortion was not even discussed.

A large number of American bishops want to chew gum and walk at the same time. They prefer to support the administration on issues where they agree and oppose it where they disagree.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, tried to speak for these bishops in his statement on Inauguration Day.

His statement started on a positive note as he prayed that God would help the president "to heal the wounds caused by this pandemic, to ease our intense political and cultural divisions, and to bring people together with renewed dedication to America's founding purposes, to be one nation under God committed to liberty and equality for all."

He declared that the "bishops are not partisan players in our nation's politics," but "When we speak on issues in American public life, we try to guide consciences, and we offer principles."

He noted that "our moral principles lead us to prudential judgments and positions that do not align neatly with the political categories of left or right or the platforms of our two major political parties."

"I look forward to working with President Biden and his administration, and the new Congress," he wrote. "As with every administration, there will be areas where we agree and work closely together and areas where we will have principled disagreement and strong opposition."

The first part of the letter put Gomez clearly in the ranks of bishops who wanted to chew gum and walk at the same time. He went on to acknowledge that Biden, as a Catholic, will be a special case.

"It will be refreshing to engage with a President who clearly understands, in a deep and personal way, the importance of religious faith and institutions," wrote Gomez. "Mr. Biden's piety and personal story, his moving witness to how his faith has brought him solace in times of darkness and tragedy, his longstanding commitment to the Gospel's priority for the poor — all of this I find hopeful and inspiring."

Certainly, this is one of the most positive statements to be made by a bishop on Biden's faith. No one can ever again call him a bad Catholic.

But the tone quickly changes in the next paragraph when the conference president stated, "our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender. Of deep concern is the liberty of the Church and the freedom of believers to live according to their consciences."

The next four paragraphs continue to lay out in detail the bishops' differences with the new Biden administration on these issues. There are no paragraphs detailing their areas of agreement.

Reports coming from Rome indicate that the Vatican was not happy with the conference statement, feeling it was too negative for such an occasion. The bishops did not issue a similar statement when Trump was inaugurated.

In an unusual move, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich criticized Gomez's statement.

"Today, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued an ill-considered statement on the day of President Biden's

inauguration," he tweeted. "Aside from the fact that there is seemingly no precedent for doing so, the statement, critical of President Biden, came as a surprise to many bishops, who received it just hours before it was released."

He said that the statement was crafted without the normal collegial consultation necessary for such an important document. Although Gomez may have wanted to chew gum and walk at the same time, the letter came off emphasizing the bishops' differences with the new administration. The bishops came across as obstructionists at a time when even Republicans are mouthing bipartisan words.

The bishops' faction that wants to wage war on the administration appears to still be in control of the bishops' conference. Whether bishops like Cupich will be able to turn around the Titanic before it crashes remains to be seen.



Thomas Reese

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's column for Religion News Service, "Signs of the Times," appears regularly at National Catholic Reporter.

Cardinal Blase Cupich



Democracy, like discipleship, is not a done deal

20 January 2021

Let me begin with two stories.

Recently, a woman told me that after her father died, she found a letter he had written to his wife on the 13th anniversary of their marriage. He told his wife they needed a "fresh start" and recounted the struggles that they were having.

The daughter was shocked to learn that her parents, who seemingly were happily married for more than 50 years, experienced moments in which their marriage was in jeopardy. Yet, after thinking about her own spiritual life, she realized that we are naive to think that we can reach a plateau in our relationships and can coast along.

Life is not like that, she noted. If it were not for the failures we would never hear God's call anew, develop and grow.

Years ago, Archbishop Fulton Sheen told priests during a retreat that he got to a point in his life when his fame as a public personality was leading him to believe that he had mastered what priesthood was about. An experience marked by personal failure and shame brought him back to reality.

One day, while visiting a leper colony, he decided to give each person a rosary. He came upon a man whose hand was eaten away totally by the disease. The archbishop was so repulsed that he just dropped the rosary onto what was left of the man's limb and walked away.

Shame quickly rushed over him for being so insensitive. He quickly went back and took the rosary from him and placed it in what remained of the leper's hand, holding on to it to let the man know he was close to him and wanted to share his suffering.

In that moment, he reminded himself why he became a priest: to share in the sufferings of others, or as St. Paul wrote, "to make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ."

These stories come to mind as we take up the Gospel of Mark in this new liturgical season and hear repeatedly how the disciples are slow to learn and only gradually come to understand the meaning of discipleship.

It is a Gospel that puts on full display how human life involves a series of failures, setbacks and breakdowns, and yet also teaches us that the fear of failure and sin should not paralyze us. Instead, such moments are opportunities for coming to a new awareness of or new awakening to the meaning of our lives and relationships.

Each of us should keep this truth in mind, as we look at the spiritual landscape of our lives. But so must the entire church.

We have more than enough examples of breakdowns in the Catholic Church, to the point that we can become paralyzed about our future. Throughout this year of Mark, the Word of God will summon us to a new awakening, to hear in our setbacks, failures and breakdowns the call to follow Jesus again and to be the church and community of faith that he wants us to be.

When we look around our world today, we see dispiriting, even shocking failures and breakdowns. Think of the pandemic. Think, too, of what transpired in our nation's capital on Jan. 6. What was meant to be a

peaceful transition to a new administration was imperiled by a deadly assault the Capitol, and indeed, an assault on democracy itself.

These events represent setbacks and institutional and societal failures. And still our faith invites us to hear God's call to build up the common good and to make a fresh start. If we do that, we will remember who we are, and who we are called to be.

Democracy, like discipleship, is not a done deal. We have to work at both, and recapture what they mean by learning from setbacks and discovering something new about who we are.

The Christmas season has passed and we have entered Ordinary Time, with the reminder that setbacks are part of ordinary life.

We also begin this season with green vestments, suggesting that as we come together in these dark winter days, we should keep our eyes on the new springtime that God is always preparing for his people. Let that be our hope as we begin a new year and a new era for our nation.



The Sanctuary Lamp burns to the Glory of God and In Loving Memory of Alfredo and Elina Avelar, with gratitude and thanksgiving for the Gift of their lives from their daughter, Terry Pedras.



What is National Catholic Schools Week?

Since 1974, National Catholic Schools Week is the annual celebration of Catholic education in the United States. It starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week, which this year is Jan. 26-Feb. 1. The theme for National Catholic Schools Week is “Catholic Schools: Learn. Serve. Lead. Succeed.” Schools typically observe the annual celebration week with Masses, open houses and other activities for students, families, parishioners and community members. Through these events, schools focus on the value Catholic education provides to young people and its contributions to our church, our communities and our nation.

Justice Corner by Carolyn Krantz, Pastoral Associate

With the advent of modern psychology our concept of “demons” in today's gospel has changed considerably from the scary being seen in a horror movie. Rather, today's “demons” are more like thoughts and feelings that pull us away from our true selves. As such, they fill us with hatred or evil intent toward another. In Ignatian discernment, we learn to test out our feelings and the movements within our souls to see whether they are from God or from the Evil One. Will they help us toward peace and tranquility or disrupt our well-being into confusion and hopelessness.

The “demons” in the Gospel today recognized Jesus. “We know who you are,” they say. Evil recognizes good as much as good recognizes evil. Jesus response is

“Quiet...be still.” This gives us a model for when we are besieged with disturbing thoughts and feelings. Be still! And in that stillness, God is found and evil leaves us. When we give over our thoughts and feelings to God, they sort themselves out. This is how even those in concentration camps in World War II found good in the middle of horrible evil. They found truth in the midst of hatred and purpose in the midst of despair. This is how Victor Frankl could write *Man's Search for Meaning* and Davis Kessler can write about the sixth stage of grieving as finding meaning in loss.

I think we are being asked to discern between good and evil spirits today. When I see pictures of the Capitol being besieged on January 6, of that young man pounding on the door over and over, I see an evil spirit. Only anger and hatred can make someone beat a hard surface again and again. I want to respond, “Come out of him. Let's sit down and talk as one human being to another in a confused and mixed up world.” Lincoln during the Civil War talked about making friends with one's enemies. We are called on to reach out to those who promote one race over another, to find the goodness in them and see if we can learn together to uphold that “All men (people) are created equal.”

There is an enigmatic saying in Matthew 11:12, “Heaven belongs to the violent and the violent shall bear it away!” The scholars say that it means that Heaven or the Reign of God shall suffer violence. And it is only by violent renunciation of the law of the past (the Jewish Law in Jesus' time and racist laws in ours) that things will change. I think this has bearing on our current situation in the United States. The country was built on slavery, but we can change a system that keeps some people down because of the color of their skin. We must face up to the

fact that the country has diminished the lives of people of color. We must acknowledge the fact that systematic racism still exists in economics, in education, in housing, in opportunity. The way out of our societal descent into rage and lies is to acknowledge the truth and work to promote civil discourse and just laws rather than fomenting rage.

January 6th was a convulsion of sorts. Now it feels like order is being restored. Now the government can resume its legislative tasks, but the convulsion is still remembered. In the stillness of our prayer, we must search for ways to build friendships, find ways to heal the divisions. We must harbor no anger or hatred, but only love and forgiveness. We must believe that we can “command unclean spirits” and expunge hatred with love.

***Parish Perspective by
Peter Degl’Innocenti, Pastoral Associate
Who’s Your Skipper***

Great news, as the coldest rainiest part of this winter has hit us, we are now given permission to have outdoor Liturgies again. I don’t know what changed from one day to the next, but the weather sure makes it seem like someone’s trying to be funny. Can you picture us having Liturgy outside with the wind and rain assaulting us like Gilligan and the Skipper on the flying bridge of the SS Minnow? But who knows, here in California the weather can change on a dime and next week we’ll have 70 degree temperatures again. Only God has a true hand on the ship’s wheel that sets our course through life.

Our valiant Knights of Columbus have been hard at work, doing the most they can under these conditions. One example is the street clean-up on Contra Loma Blvd. Since it is a major thoroughfare leading to the on/off ramps of Highway 4 it sees a lot of traffic

and, therefore, a lot of litterbugs who think it’s their private trashcan. It’s a never-ending job that the Knights tackle on an ongoing basis. One Knight ventured all the way to the on ramps and was mortified by what had collected over a retaining wall that isn’t visible unless you stick your head over and look. He said it looked as if it hadn’t been cleaned in 7 years! Caltrans has been notified.

This Sunday’s readings center around the voice of God. Who will speak his words? Who has the “voice of authority” when it comes to what God wants us to do with and within our lives? It is right that the word should be spoken not from a thundering voice from heaven but from one of us, human, familiar, and spoken with love. One Knight of Columbus recalled the time his son was born. Seeing the crowning of his head, hearing his first cry for breath, and seeing him cradled in his mother’s arms. He reached out to his son who instinctively grabbed his finger. His son’s expression unchanging until he spoke the words, “My son.” With that his son smiled for the first time, recognizing the familiar voice he heard many times in the womb.

The voice of God is recognizable in its truth not its volume. No amount of shouting, hoopla, or man-made credentials can stand against the penetrating truth of God’s word. With a word the evil spirits obey, and seas are calmed. He is our good skipper.

January 2021 Opportunities for Involvement



Ruby Slippers Virtual Gala: This year, Hope Solutions will present our annual fundraising gala, [Ruby Slippers- There's No Place Like Home](#) in the comfort of your own home on Saturday, February 27th, 2021. Ruby Slippers will be virtual and live-streamed from the [Ruby Slippers Gala event page](#). FREE event registration at: <https://hopesolutions.ejoinme.org/RubySlippers2021>. There will be a live and silent auction with some fabulous items to bid on, and we hope to add even more! Support the silent auction by donating an item, package, or gift card; visit our sign-up list at <https://tinyurl.com/yynbd9uy>. If you have vacation homes, unused airline miles, luxury items or unique experiences that you are willing to donate to our auction, please contact Carrie Veurink, Manager of Development Outreach at cveurink@hopesolutions.org or call at (925) 542-5068.



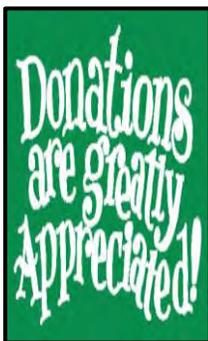
Homework Club Support: We are looking for compassionate individuals to help in our (now virtual) afterschool Homework Club that runs from August through June. You will provide academic and mentoring support to children from extremely low-income homes in grades K-12. Commitment is one day a week, either AM or PM, Monday through Thursday for the remaining of the school year. Adults and high school sophomores through seniors are encouraged to apply at www.hopesolutions.org/volunteer.



Volunteers to Pick Up and Deliver Furniture: Transporting furniture to new residents throughout Contra Costa County is a great challenge during these times. A volunteer that can pick-up donated furniture and deliver them various households throughout Contra Costa County is needed. Deliveries will be PORCH DELIVERIES ONLY, no need to set up. If you are able to help, please contact Sandibel Arnold at sarnold@hopesolutions.org.



Furnishings: Every month we have families and individuals moving into homes. We try our best to provide furnishings and household items for incoming residents. This month we are looking for furnishings as well as cleaning supplies, kitchen kits, bath towels, dishes, pots and pans, and silverware. We are in need of beds and bedding. This month we are in need of several full- and twin-size beds. Please note that mattresses and bedding must be new. If you are able to donate any of these items or would like more information, please contact Sandibel Arnold at sarnold@hopesolutions.org. For a complete list of furnishings and items needed this month, please take a look at the attached Furnishing Request sheet [here](#).



Seeking In-Kind Donations:

- New Twin and Full size mattresses and bedding as well as frames and platforms
- \$25 gift cards to Grocery Outlet, FoodMaxx, or Walmart
- Menstrual products of all kinds
- Diapers size 1 through 6 and baby wipes for families in our program
- \$5 Starbucks and Jamba Juice gift cards for report card check-ins
- Welcome Kits for new families moving into permanent housing (laundry basket filled with cleaning supplies, small household items, and \$25 gift card to FoodMaxx or Grocery Outlet)
- Cleaning supplies for our multi-site clients (Comet, Windex, Simple Green, buckets, mops, etc.)

Stay informed! Like us on Facebook [@hopesolutionsnonprofit](#) Get all the latest news about Hope Solutions and the housing landscape in Contra Costa County. Read stories about our impact, and the many residents we serve together. Sign up for our mailing list here: <https://tinyurl.com/lgdp3gs>.



Furnishings and Donations Request for January 2021

Hope Solutions provides new and lightly used household items and furniture for our incoming clients. Below is a list of items that we are requesting for the month of *January*. Please note that this list changes every month. We ask that all items are like new or gently used. Due to storage capacity, pick up, drop off, and delivery will be determined per item.

Furniture	Household/Kitchen Items	Bathroom Items
4 Full Size Beds	5 Sets of Cleaning Supplies	5 Shower Curtains
4 Bedding Sets-Full Size	5 Sets of Pots and Pans	5 Sets of Hand Towels
8 Pillows	5 Sets of Dishes	5 Sets of Washcloths
3 Dresser	5 Sets of Glasses	5 Sets of Bath Towels
4 Lamp	5 Sets of Silverware	3 Bathroom Rugs
2 Twin Size Beds	5 Wastebaskets	
1 Bookshelf/Entertainment Center	5 Boxes of Trashbags	
2 End Tables	5 Buckets and Mops	
1 Dining Table and Chairs	5 Brooms and Dustpans	
1 Coffee Table	5 Stepstools	
1 Small Sofa/Loveseat	5 Laundry Baskets	
2 Dressers	3 Toasters	
2 Queen Size Blankets	1 Set of Lightbulbs	
	2 Coffee Makers	
	2 Vacuums	

If you would like to donate any of the items above, please contact Sandibel Arnold at sarnold@hopesolutions.org. For furniture donations, please send a picture of items to sarnold@hopesolutions.org or to 925-788-3676. Please include location and if you are able to deliver or would need pick up.

We do not accept the following donations (including but not limited to):

- Used bedding
- Used pillows
- Used mattresses
- Used towels of any kind
- Non-working items
- Broken or badly worn items
- Stuffed animals
- Used car seats

Used Toys



COVID PROGRAM

www.shelterinc.org/renthelp

The new COVID program serves community members affected by the COVID-19 virus.

Available Assistance

- Payment of past due rent
- Payment of current month's rent
- Payment of future month's rent
- Payment of utilities (PG&E, garbage, water)



COVID PROGRAM

- Participants affected by COVID-19
- Able to prove how they are being affected by COVID-19 virus
- No need to prove self-sufficiency
- Not able to pay past, present, and/or future rent

www.shelterinc.org/renthelp



More Info and to apply

A SHELTER, Inc. case manager will analyze the impacts affecting the household's income. Funding decisions will be based on individual needs and funding availability.

www.shelterinc.org/renthelp

INSPIRING PEOPLE • CHANGING LIVES • ENDING HOMELESSNESS