

FLORIDACatholic

PALM BEACH DIOCESE

Dedicated to Jesus in virginity

Simi Sahu enters order of virgins living in the world

CECILIA PADILLA
of the Florida Catholic staff

PALM BEACH GARDENS | Dressed in a flowing gown of white lace, Simi Sahu approached the beautifully decorated sanctuary of the Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola, Feb. 11, 2021, ready to be consecrated to a life of virginity for women living in the world.

Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito addressed the young woman with three questions: "Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of virginity and in the service of God and his Church? Are you resolved to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel that your whole life may be a faithful witness to God's love and a convincing sign of the kingdom of heaven? Are you resolved to accept solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God?"

To these questions Sahu humbly, yet with conviction, answered a resounding, "I am." With these words, Sahu

became the first consecrate virgin from the St. Thomas Syro Malabar Diocese of Chicago. She received special permission from Bishop Mar Jacob Angadiath to remain Syro-Malabar Catholic and is now joining the Order of Virgins at the Diocese of Palm Beach. Although there are other consecrated virgins living in the Diocese of

FYI

- To view Simi Sahu's Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World from Feb. 11, 2021, visit the Diocese of Palm Beach Office of Vocations Facebook @PBVocations.

- To read the March 2020 *Florida Catholic* interview with Simi Sahu as she shares her faith journey and more about consecrated virginity, visit www.thefloridacatholic.org.

Palm Beach, she is the first to receive formation and be consecrated in the diocese.

What is a consecrated virgin? The Office of Vocations of the Diocese of Palm Beach explained that in the New Testament, we find the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ. This image reveals the intimate relationship Jesus wants with those who believe in him. Since apostolic times, this expression of the mystery of the Church has been demonstrated by women who are dedicated to Jesus in virginity. They experience the spiritual fertility of an intimate relationship with him and offer the fruits of this relationship to the Church and the world. Consecrated virgins dedicate their life in prayer and service to the Church but, unlike nuns and sisters, they live and work in the secular world. This vocation is rare with only around 200 Consecrated Virgins in the United States, and around 4,000 in the world.

Sahu's consecration was greatly anticipated, not only because it was a first for many to witness in the Diocese of Palm Beach, but also because of its almost year-long postponement from March 25, 2020. Shortly before the original date of consecration, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the diocese to suspend Masses to the public, forcing Sahu to postpone her plans.

That did not deter the young woman, however, from undergoing an extended discernment process. On Feb. 11, 2021, a limited number of family and friends sat in the pews of the cathedral socially distanced and wearing facial coverings, eagerly awaiting to see Sahu walk down the aisle. Many of her loved ones — in the United States and in her native India



During the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World, Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito places a ring on Simi Sahu's finger saying, "Receive the ring that marks you as a bride of Christ. Keep unstained your fidelity to your bridegroom, that you may one day be admitted to the wedding feast of everlasting joy." (PHOTOS BY CECILIA PADILLA | FC)



Simi Sahu humbly lays on the ground during the Litany of the Saints.

— tuned in from home via the livestream feed provided by Shalom Media. Members of the Emmanuel Church family, where Sahu works as the parish accountant, were also present.

Sahu chose a new date of consecration that coincided with the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, an image of the Blessed Mother who visited young Bernadette Soubirous with the intention of inspiring others to follow more deeply her son, Jesus Christ. The cathedral was decorated for a wedding celebration with lilac tulle lining the main aisle and brightly colored floral arrangements displayed on the altar steps.

This image of Sahu as the bride of Christ is outlined in the language of the rite, "God's loving wisdom chooses those

who made sacrifice of marriage for the sake of the love of which it is the sign. They renounce the joys of human marriage but, cherish all that it foreshadows."

The rite continues, "Those who choose chastity have looked upon the face of Christ, its origin and inspiration. They give themselves wholly to Christ, the son of the ever-virgin Mary, and the heavenly bridegroom of those who in his honor dedicate themselves to the lasting virginity."

These words are further symbolized in Sahu receiving a veil and ring from the bishop, denoting her commitment and devotion to her bridegroom, Jesus. The bishop also presented her with the Liturgy of the Hours, "the prayer of the Church." Bishop Barbarito said to Sahu, "May the praise of our heavenly Father be always on your lips, pray without ceasing for the salvation of the whole world."

At the end of the Mass, Sahu turned to her family and friends in the pews, as well as to those watching from home, to express her gratitude for all those who saw her through the discernment process. She reflected on what it means to become a consecrated virgin during present times.

Sahu said, "I always wondered what the Second Vatican Council fathers had in mind to be proclaiming Christ as bridegroom in this vocation for some women to image the church as bride of Christ. I thought how interesting it was they chose the late 1960s to be proclaiming this vocation. And 2021, hardly seems like a better time for such a spousal and amorous title for Jesus to be called the bridegroom. It seems a little bit much and maybe even a little shocking but, perhaps this title was made exactly for a time like this. Who is bridegroom if not Jesus?" ■



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The Order of Virgins: A prophetic vocation

Editor's note: The following is Bishop Gerald Barbarito's homily during the consecration to the Order of Virgins of Simi Tresa Sahu, Feb. 11, 2021.

Simi, my sister in Christ, it was almost a year ago, on the feast of the Annunciation, that you were to be consecrated in the Order of Virgins. Due to the restrictions imposed upon us by the coronavirus, that celebration was wisely postponed until today, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. You chose both days in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We are all so joyful to be here, your family, your friends, as



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LOVE

**Bishop
Gerald
Barbarito**

well as those not able to be here but are watching this celebration through livestreaming. This is truly a day for the Church, our Diocese and for all society so much in need of the word and example you are giving today. A great deal has occurred since last year. Obviously, the pandemic has been ever present and has caused a great deal of suffering, fear, uncertainty, and a continued loss of normalcy. A great deal has also occurred in the world, our country, and our communities. Heightened levels of mistrust are present, violence has become more prominent, and a new anger is present which touches almost every aspect of life. It is more difficult to discern the factual truth of what is before us. The ultimate truth of God is pushed further and further away echoing Pilate's question to Jesus, "What is truth?" It is obvious that we live in a context in which it is believed we can re-create ourselves in an alternate manner from that which God has made us in so many ways. We are losing our identity as made in the image and likeness of God as well as being created by Him in a particular way. The very meaning of marriage and family life is being lost. As we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, we recognize the need for radical healing in ourselves, in our nation and in our world and we look to the Virgin Mother of God as a healer through her Son.

Simi, today you make a public commitment in the Church which



Simi Sahu, third from left, celebrates her consecration with Bishop Gerald Barbarito, center, her family, including her sister, far left, mother, father and brother. (CECILIA PADILLA | FC)

speaks directly to the healing that is needed. You become a consecrated person by embracing a life of virginity so as to become the spouse of Christ, entering into a more intimate relationship with Him. You become a visible sign to all of us that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and it is a personal relationship with Him that is the foundation of all of our lives in the vocations to which He has called us, be it as consecrated men and women, priests, deacons, married couples, single persons, younger, older and in whatever daily occupations we carry out. You will receive symbols that mark your consecration and spousal relationship: a ring, a veil and the Church's constant prayer to God, the Liturgy of the Hours. You will continue to live in the world and to carry out your daily life and occupation but with a consecration to the Lord that is sacrificial and at the same time life-giving for you and for all of us.

The Order of virgins has been present in the Church from its earliest times. Some of the great saints of the early Church were virgins who also became martyrs. Saints Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecelia, mentioned in the first Eucharistic prayer, were among them. As other forms of consecrated life emerged in the Church, particularly the religious communities, the Order of Virgins began to decrease until

its revival in the Second Vatican Council. Many centuries after its disappearance in a radically transformed historical context, the public witness of consecrated virginity renewed itself in a world that needed such witness.

On May 31 of last year, the feast of Pentecost, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, addressed the consecrated virgins of the world on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the reintroduction of the Order of Virgins into the life of the Church. He expressed to them, "Your vocation is a sign of the inexhaustible and manifold richness of the gifts of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, who makes all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). It is likewise a sign of hope, pointing to the fidelity of the Father, who even today, awakens in the hearts of some women that desire to be consecrated to the Lord in virginity, lived out in a concrete social and cultural setting, rooted in a particular Church, and expressed in a way of life that is ancient, yet modern and ever new."

Pope Francis often speaks of the need to dream. He has done so as he opened this Year of St Joseph who was spoken to by God in dreams. The Pope often speaks of the dreams of God and those of himself and recently published a personal book of reflections, Let Us Dream. Speaking of the crisis we face today, he says in his book, "To come out of this crisis better, we have to see clearly, choose well,

and act right. Let's talk about how. Let us dare to dream." Virginity today and always has been a dream in which we can see clearly, choose well, act rightly and thus be possessed by the truth so much needed today and throughout history.

I would like to close my reflection with the words addressed by the Holy Father to all the virgins of the Church last year on Pentecost. These words truly can be addressed to you today, Simi, as you consecrate yourself as a virgin in the Church and in our Diocese. The Pope said, "I would say this to you: do not extinguish the prophetic nature of your vocation! You have been called, not because of your own merits, but by God's mercy, to make your lives a reflection of the face of the Church, the Bride of Christ." My sister, we are all grateful to you for daring to dream by heeding the call of a prophetic vocation and for being a visible sign of the need that we all possess for Christ who alone heals us and the world.

We pray to Our Lady: Virgin of virgins, gate of heaven, inspire and accompany this, our sister, Simi, that she may have the gift of spiritual discernment. As a pilgrim in the world may she live the dream of prophecy with freedom and courage and with determination and tenderness. May the Lord, through His Mother, continue to bring to fulfillment the good work He has begun in you. ■

Thousands of hand sanitizers donated to local parish

LINDA REEVES

Florida Catholic correspondent

BOCA RATON | Although the pandemic has limited activities for many church groups with community outreach focuses, the Knights of Columbus Council 11241 of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Boca Raton has taken this challenging time as an opportunity to adapted to their community's needs.

"We are a real working council," said Joseph Garofalo, a council member present at Our Lady of Lourdes Church with fellow Knights Jan. 30 and 31, 2021, distributing thousands of eight-ounce bottles of hand sanitizer to those attending weekend Masses.

The January service project was one of several new initiatives the council has carried out over the past year to keep its members connected and steadfast in mission during the COVID-19 pandemic. Garofalo and his fellow Knights donned gloves and facial coverings to distribute 7,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, a commodity that has become a critical staple. At times, it is impossible to find on store shelves and can be overpriced, making it an expense for those who have lost work due to business closures.

Marie George, a parishioner, expressed her surprise and thanks when she was given a bottle of the sanitizer as she walked up to the church. "Is it free?" she asked. "Thank you. God bless you."

Product Management Group, a Boca Raton company, donated seven pallets of the sanitizer to Scott Decubellis, Grand Knight of the parish council. Decubellis explained that the sanitizer was part of a surplus, and the company wanted to give it to someone who could put it to good use.



Scott Decubellis, Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus Council 11241, offers Marie George, a parishioner of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, a bottle of hand sanitizer. The council distributed the sanitizer to people attending Masses, Jan. 30 and 31, 2021, as part of a community outreach project the men organized. Shown in the background is John Kanig and Richard Daddieco helping with the project. (LINDA REEVES | FC)

"The Knights of Columbus have been the front-runners in providing a safe environment in our church, in addition to strengthening parishioners' faith and calling them to return to Sunday Mass." — Father Medina

"I thought about my brother Knights and how it could be used to serve the community," Decubellis said.

Council 11241 has more than 220 members ready to serve but, some of the organization's traditional works of service have been put on hold or planned with new safety protocols in mind. With the onset

of the pandemic, the council increased their commitment to keeping parishioners safe by adding new activities to their agenda. When local churches reopened to the public in May 2020, the men stepped up to help their pastor, Father Eduardo Medina, with reopening measures and with a mind for moving forward.

The Knights have kept a watchful eye out during Masses making sure everyone is wearing a mask and social distancing. Council members also took charge of sanitizing the church after Masses cleaning the pews, rails and doorknobs to make the environment clean and virus free.

"As Knights of Columbus, our

commitment is to the protection of our parish community," Decubellis said. "We will continue to do so for as long as we are needed. We thank Father Medina for allowing us to assist in this important responsibility."

The Knights have focused many of their efforts into parishioner engagement over the pandemic months through increased spiritual works and faith-based activities. Bible studies, a men's retreat and several faith enrichment programs are planned for the Lenten season to help men better prepare for faith journeys leading up to Easter.

"We have had an amazing year," Decubellis said. "I am so proud of individuals who have stepped up to the plate. Father Medina is extremely supportive. He makes sure we have all the resources we need and is so good about helping us out."

In December 2020, the council was ranked number two out of 400 local councils for their membership drive and recruitment efforts. Membership is once again on the rise with 26 new members this year. Honors of distinction include the "Star Award," a prestigious recognition by the Florida State council for high performance in overall operations.

"The Knights of Columbus have been the front-runners in providing a safe environment in our church, in addition to strengthening parishioners' faith and calling them to return to Sunday Mass," said Father Medina in recognition of the Knights' service and dedication. ■

To learn more about the Knights of Columbus Council 11241 of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Boca Raton, visit lourdeschurchboca.org or call 561-483-2440.

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CATHOLIC CITIZENSHIP ESSAY CONTEST



Saint John Paul II Academy in Boca Raton held a ceremony recognizing three student award winners for the Knights of Columbus 2020-2021 Catholic Citizenship Essay Contest. This contest encourages youth to be more connected to their community and their faith. The goal of this program is to involve young Catholics in civic discourse and instill in them religious and life-affirming values. The students wrote an essay of 500 to 750 words discussing how trusting in God during a difficult time has helped many people find the strength and hope to endure it. Essay contest winners Grace Rodriguez (class of 2021), Zenya Gallagher (class of 2021) and Mia Fortugno (class of 2024) received their awards from representatives from the St. Jude Parish Knights of Columbus. (COURTESY)

Students honor grandparents, elderly through virtual message

STAFF REPORT

WEST PALM BEACH | On Jan. 31, Pope Francis established World Day for Grandparents and Elderly, which will take place annually on the fourth Sunday in July, coinciding with the feasts of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus.

Pope Francis recalled the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple when the elderly Simeon and Anna encountered the child Jesus and recognized him as the Messiah. "The Holy Spirit even today stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly," the pope said, adding the voice of the elderly "is precious ... because it sings the praises of God and preserves the roots of the peoples."

This is a Christian value that students at St. Ann School in West Palm Beach recognized and honored during Catholic Schools Week in late January 2021, when a day was dedicated to celebrating the value grandparents bring to the Catholic faith and family life. Schools typically invite grandparents to visit campus on this day for a special Mass, luncheons and special school activities. But since many students could not celebrate with their grandparents due to COVID-19, Danielle Twist, a second grade teacher and religious director at St. Ann School, collaborated with classroom teachers to create video greetings for grandparents living near and far.

"Since St. Ann is the grandparent of Jesus, she's also the grandparent of the Church," Twist said. "I thought it would be nice for us, as a school, to give grandparents the opportunity to see their grandchildren and preserve those relationships, even if in a small way."

Students were thrilled to be

making video messages for their loved ones. "A couple of students were talking about how they didn't get to see their grandparents for Christmas, which, for some, is the only time they get to visit," Twist said. "One family shared with me that their grandmother usually travels from New Jersey specifically for Grandparents Day. The family said their grandmother was teary-eyed and was so appreciative after watching the video message."

The videos made include a variety of messages, songs, lists of reasons why the students love their grandparents, prayers and more. Father Nestor Rodriguez, pastor, and Father Dennis Gonzales, parochial vicar, opened the video with a greeting and special prayer on be-

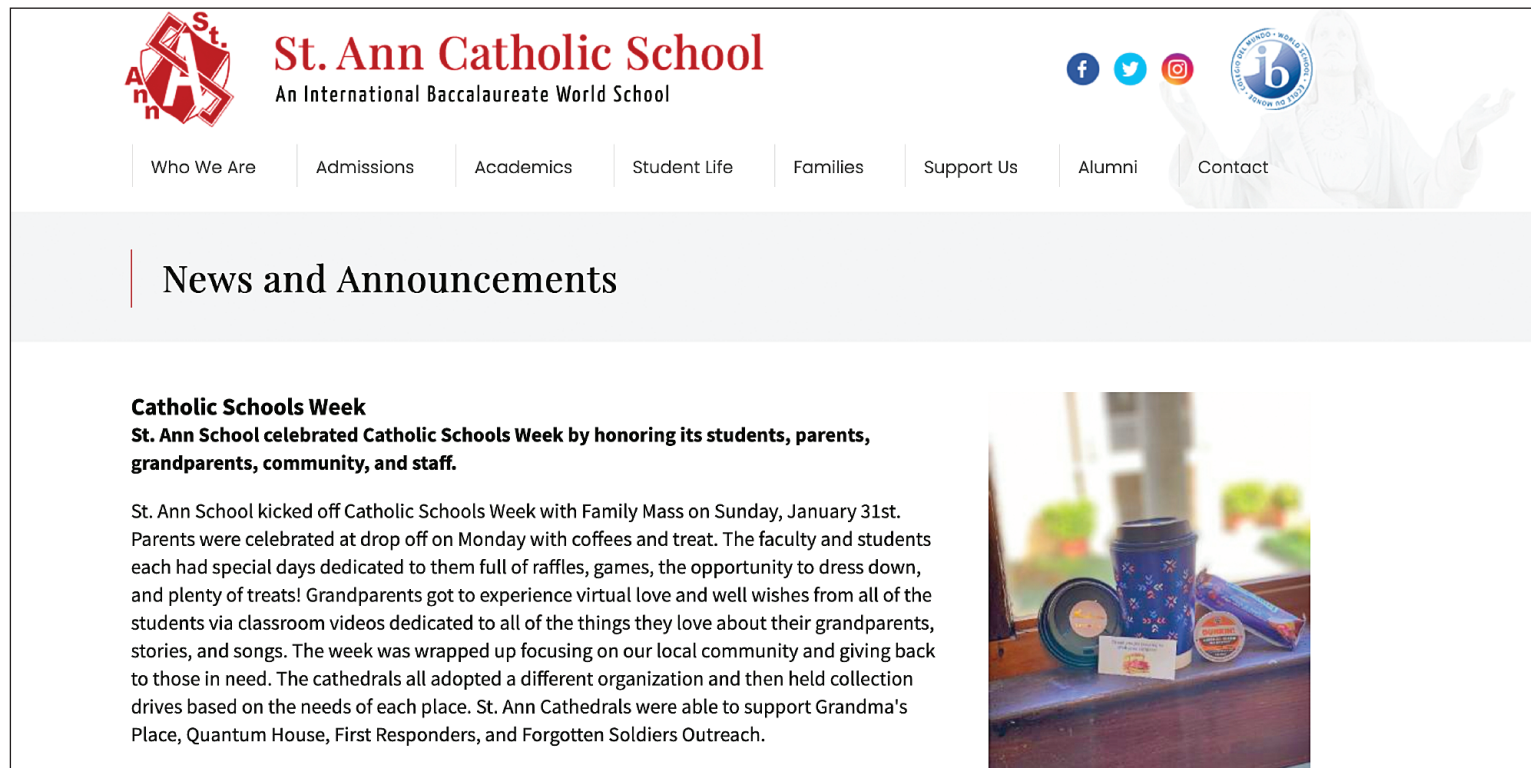
half of the grandparents who could not be there for Catholic Schools Week.

Father Rodriguez prayed, "May grandparents continue to be, for their families, strong pillars of Gospel faith, guardians of the noble domestic ideals, and living treasures of sound religious tradi-

tions. That they may pass on the fruits of their mature human and spiritual traditions to the younger generations." ■

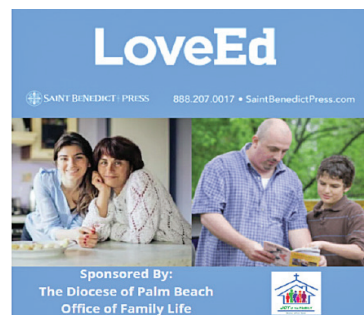
To learn more about St. Ann School, visit stannwpb.org or call 561-832-3676. Follow the school on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @

[stannwpb.org](https://www.stannwpb.org). Stay connected with the Office of Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Palm Beach online at diocesepbschools.org. For updates on the 18 diocesan Catholic schools, follow the office on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @DoPBCatholicSchools.



A screenshot from St. Ann School website discussing Catholic Schools Week. www.stannwpb.org

Fathers and sons encouraged to have 'the talk' through LoveEd



The Office of Family Life of the Diocese of Palm Beach brings the faithful of the diocese LoveEd by Saint Benedict Press. These virtual courses help families, parishes and schools empower parents to teach both the theology and science of human sexuality within the context of God's plan for love and life. It helps young people discover the beauty and the purpose of their

sexuality, which is fully articulated in Catholic teaching. It is an age appropriate, gender specific program designed to give parents the knowledge and support they need to discuss what is often an uncomfortable topic develop closer relationships with their children.

The upcoming sessions of LoveEd are being offered specifically for fathers and sons beginning Feb. 26, 2021, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. (parent only introduction session); Feb. 27 from 9-11 a.m. (fathers and sons, ages 9-11); Feb. 27 from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. (father and sons, ages 11-14).

To register, visit https://www.diocesepb.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.details&Content_Id=501766&returnTo=main or contact Beth Zanolletti, Diocese of Palm Beach Office of Family Life, at 561-775-9553 or email bzanotelli@diocesepb.org.



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FLORIDACatholic

Catholics observe Lent 2021

FLORIDA CATHOLIC STAFF

ORLANDO | Lent. *La Cuaresma. Sezon nan Karèm.*

Beginning Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17, Catholics worldwide observe the next 40 days of Lent to recall and honor Jesus' temptation in the desert and ultimate sacrifice for God's people.

As Catholics observe this somber season of grief, the *Florida Catholic* has compiled inspirational quotes within several videos to provide inspiration and hope during personal Lenten journeys. The 30-second videos are meant to remind viewers of the hope and appreciation that can blossom during Lent as it leads up to Easter Sunday.

Just as the Catholic Church reminds its members to partake in days of fasting and abstinence, it also reminds the faithful the verses of Matthew 6:16-18: "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Lent brings with it an observance of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins that culminates to the Triduum — Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday — and Easter Sunday, when the triumph of Christ's resurrection becomes a celebration that brings new hope to Christians everywhere.

The *Florida Catholic* hopes its series of short, Lenten videos — which will soon be available in Spanish and Haitian Creole — might accompany the faithful and all our readers on their own journey towards Easter. **CLICK HERE** for the first video, and check our website every week for a new video. ■



Know Someone With Cancer? (or other life-threatening illness?)

St. Peregrine prayed and the Lord miraculously cured his cancer. You need only ask St. Peregrine to intercede for your friend or family member. God answers all prayers.

Also ask St. Peregrine to intercede with the Lord to make your loved one ready for the moment when a loving God comes to meet us face-to-face.

A SPECIAL NOVENA OF MASSES AND PRAYERS

to seek the aid of St. Peregrine — Patron of those afflicted with cancer or other life-threatening illness — will start March 11. Please send your intentions today and ask for your free folder and blessed St. Peregrine medal. God is our comfort and hope.



St. Peregrine Devotion
Franciscan Friars
P.O. Box 598
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New York 10551

PAD22126



Novena of Hope: St. Peregrine

Dear Fathers:
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Or enter your information at:
franciscanmissionassoc.org/pad

16TH ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

Long-Sleeve Relief Drive 2021

Ash Wednesday
(FEB. 17, 2021)

thru Holy Thursday
(APRIL 1, 2021)



Drop-off locations ready to receive shirts

ORLANDO | With the 16th annual Long-Sleeve Relief Drive underway, the *Florida Catholic* has partnered with several locations across the state to serve as collection sites for long-sleeve shirts. At press time, four Farmworker Association offices and four St. Vincent de Paul thrift stores and one Catholic Charities office.

While the number of collection sites are fewer than in years past, much because of safety issues related to COVID-19, commitment to the campaign is even greater. The pandemic has brought health and economic challenges to the already financially challenged farmworker community.

The *Florida Catholic* and its partners hope the community at large continued to support this campaign. Shirts are always welcome, but note that small, medium and large long-sleeve shirts are the best sizes to donate.

Farmworker Association offices have also said there is a need for diapers and feminine hygiene products. Those can be donated to those office sites and Catholic Charities, along with shirts.

The following are collection sites at press time. More locations will be added though updates. Up-to-date PDFs are made available online at <https://www.thefloridacatholic.org/news/advocacy/long-sleeve-relief/>

For listings below, office times are Monday through Fridays.

FARMWORKER ASSOCIATION OFFICES

- **Apopka** — 1264 Apopka Blvd. farmworkerassoc@aol.com 407-886-5151; 9 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Pierson** — 111 Fountain Drive 386-749-9826; 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Immokalee** — 106 S. 2nd Street, Suite, 10; 407-886-5151; 9 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Fellsmere** — 29 S. Maple Street 772-453-9425 or 772-571-0081 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL THRIFT STORES

- **Apopka** — 770 S. Orange Blossom Trail 407-886-0940; 9 a.m.-7 p.m.
- **Clermont** — 601 E. Highway 50 352-242-0357; 9 a.m.-7 p.m.
- **Bradenton** — 1111 8th Ave. W. 941-746-0622; 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m..
- **Cape Coral** — 2023 Del Prado

HOW TO HELP

COLLECTING SHIRTS

- Hold a drive in your parish.
- Run bulletin announcements.
- Arrange for delivery of the shirts to the closest specified collection/distribution sites.
- If you are participating, contact Kristen Maheu with your name and/or the name of your organization at: lsr@thefloridacatholic.org or call 407-373-0075.

MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS

- If you choose to make a monetary donation, make your check payable to the Florida Catholic and mail to: Long Sleeve Relief, PO Box 4993, Orlando, FL 32802-4993

Blvd. 239-573-0217; 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturdays, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES

- **Riviera Beach** — St. Francis Center, 100 W. 20th Street Call for drop off — 561-360-3327; 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Along with those collection sites, there are parishes participating in the campaign as well. A PDF of parishes is available at <https://www.thefloridacatholic.org/news/advocacy/long-sleeve-relief/>

Orlando Diocese

St. John Vianney, Orlando; Our Lady of the Lakes, Deltona; Blessed Sacrament Parish, Cocoa; St. Gerard Mission, Edgewater; Immaculate Conception, Melbourne Beach, St. Margaret Mary, Winter Park; St. Andrew, Orlando, Holy Redeemer, Kissimmee; St. Mary Magdalen, Altamonte Springs, Divine Mercy, Merritt Island.

Palm Beach Diocese

St. Mary, Pahokee; St. Vincent Ferrer, Delray Beach, St. Lucie, Port Saint Lucie; St. John the Evangelist, Boca Raton.

Venice Diocese

St. Agnes, Naples; Incarnation, Sarasota; St. William, Naples; Our Lady of Light, Estero.

Tax-deductible, monetary contributions are always welcome and can sent to the Orlando office of the *Florida Catholic* (see box above). At press time, with only two days officially into the campaign, \$400 has already been donated. ■

SCULPTOR DEDICATES CAREER TO BIBLE

MIAMI | Some large-scale sculptors make abstract art to fulfill their egos. Timothy Schmalz finds a different source of inspiration: holy writ.

Schmalz, a Canadian artist, is the creator of "Angels Unawares," a huge bronze sculpture that's on display in Miami's Bayfront Park, 301 Biscayne Blvd., until April 8, 2021. The sculpture, showing a 20-foot-long boat crowded with refugees from various lands, was commissioned and blessed by Pope Francis.

The original stands in St. Peter's Square; a replica has been on a U.S. tour since April 2020.

"I believe there is an aspect of God's will in what I'm doing," Schmalz, 51, said by phone from his home in St. Jacobs, Ontario. "Artwork has the potential to show unity, harmony, showing that all human life is sacred."

Schmalz has long worked on Scripture-based sculptures. He is perhaps best known for his "Homeless Jesus," showing the Son of God lying on a bench. It's part of a series on Matthew 25, showing Jesus enduring hunger, sickness, poverty and other plights.

Taking the form of a boat, "Angels Unawares" conveys both movement and solidity. The 140 passengers — Jewish, Muslim, Cherokee, African, Irish Catholic and others — are crowded into a boat, showing a range of emotions: grief, fatigue, anticipation. Above them, in their midst, stretch angel wings, suggesting that their lives are sacred. It's a literal interpretation of Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

As Schmalz describes it, the design of "Angels Unawares" is meant to accomplish several goals.

One is to highlight migrants and refugees, whom he believes are invisible to most people. "If we can take these people and put them on a pedestal, and put a message on the pedestal that we have to love one another and care for the stranger, we can do something wonderful."

Another goal is to place people next to others who are unlike them. Schmalz packed the 140 figures so close, they're

literally joined together. And as a near-life-size artwork, "Angels Unawares" shows individual hats, faces and clothing styles. That gives them poise and humanity.

"I wanted to give dignity to a lot of people," Schmalz said. "They don't look like Greek goddesses. They're real people. That's so important."

Schmalz also wants viewers to reflect on their own lives and pasts, to remember migration in their heritage as well. If we're all from someplace else, we're literally in the same boat.

"When you see scripture, you see yourself," Schmalz said. "You can't look at any angle (of "Angels Unawares") without seeing your ancestors or yourself."

The way Schmalz tells it, the genesis of "Angels Unawares" sounds almost providential. Two decades ago, he donated to a Jesuit campaign against AIDS in central Africa. He got a thank-you note from a Father Michael Czerny, detailing the work. The priest later looked him up in Canada, and they became friends.

Now a cardinal, Cardinal Czerny serves under-secretary for the new migrants and refugees section at the Vatican, reporting directly to Pope Francis. He asked Schmalz to make a sculpture on the topic of refugees and immigrants — and the boat motif sprang to mind.

He made a small version, five feet long, for Pope Francis to consider. The pope approved it, and Schmalz set to work on the full-size piece. It helped to get personal feedback from the Holy Father after the dedication of the Vatican sculpture. As the two walked around it, Francis looked at him, smiled and placed both hands on his heart.

Although Schmalz is enjoying the response to "Angels Unawares," he isn't resting. He's already deep into his next project: another massive sculpture, showing a woman opening a dungeon hatch for others to escape. Calling it "Let the Oppressed Go Free," he's making the sculpture a tribute to St. Josephine Bakhita, a 19th century Sudanese woman who is the patron saint of human trafficking. ■

'Angels Unawares' arrives at 'the South's Ellis Island'

ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO
Florida Catholic staff

MIAMI | In South Florida, the boat full of refugees rests on sand, in a grassy corner of Bayfront Park, facing Biscayne Boulevard and three blocks south of the Freedom Tower.

"Angels Unawares," a massive bronze sculpture honoring migrants and refugees, arrived from Atlanta the morning of Feb. 9, 2021. It was met by a crane and crew of workers from Florida Lemark who, after three hours of work, had installed it on the 24-foot long by 16-foot wide sand box where it will remain on display through April 8, 2021.

David Prada, director of the archdiocesan Office of Building and Property, and Florida Lemark vice president Eduardo Rodriguez, supervised the installation.

The sculpture, a full-size replica of the one blessed by Pope Francis in 2019 and installed in St. Peter's Square, travels in a specially built steel cage which Prada described as "a work of art in itself."

The cage weighs 500 pounds and is connected to the sculpture's base by 20 bolts. "All the load is transferred through the cage," Prada said, allowing the sculpture to be transported and moved without damaging the artwork, which weighs 9,000 pounds.

But before it's freed from its cage, a worker must literally climb inside the sculpture, accessing it from underneath, to install the wings, which are stored separately and weigh 50 pounds each. That was accomplished by a technique known as cribbing: creating a temporary platform to support the sculpture a few feet off the ground.

Afterwards, the cage and sculpture were placed on the bed of sand, prepared a day earlier by Florida Lemark. Prada used a measuring tape to ensure the sculpture was placed exactly in the middle of the box, with the boat's prow at a 45-degree angle, facing north on Biscayne Boulevard.

"My motto is measure twice, cut once," said Prada.

After removing the 20 bolts, the workers steadied the steel cage as the crane slowly lifted it up and away from the artwork.

"One of the nicest things about this was the teamwork that built up among the cities that are hosting it," said Prada, referring to the help the Archdiocese of Miami received from the Archdiocese of Atlanta, where the statue had been on display throughout January.

Via several Zoom calls, Neil



Workers from Florida Lemark remove the cage used to transport the sculpture "Angels Unawares" while installing it in Miami's Bayfront Park, where it will be on display through April 8, 2021. The installation took place Feb. 9, 2021. (PHOTOS BY TOM TRACY | FC)



Detail of the faces on the sculpture "Angels Unawares," framed by Miami's Freedom Tower in the background.



The "Angels Unawares" sculpture sits in a corner of Bayfront Park, surrounded by the tall buildings of downtown Miami.

and Carolyn Johnson of Canonbury Homes, Inc. and Kensington Homes Preservation, shared their insights and experience in receiving and installing the sculpture in Atlanta.

Deborah Brown of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. — where "Angels Unawares" will find a permanent home once its tour of North American cities concludes — also was instrumental in connecting everyone, including the sculpture's creator, Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz.

"And we're going to do the same for the next town," said Prada, referring to the sculpture's next stop, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Before Atlanta, the sculpture had visited Boston, Brooklyn and Catholic U.

A generous donation from a lo-

cal Catholic and patron of the arts, Carlos de la Cruz, Sr., made it possible for the archdiocese to host the sculpture.

Archbishop Thomas Wenski blessed the artwork Feb. 10, 2021 before a small group of civic officials, including Miami City Commissioner Joe Carrollo and other members of the Bayfront Park Management Trust, who gave permission for the archdiocese to place the sculpture at that location.

"This was his vision to have it there, to give it high visibility," said Prada of the archbishop.

As the archbishop noted on an Instagram post and at the dedication: "Miami is the South's Ellis Island and a fitting place to host this sculpture that honors migrants and refugees." ■

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NATION

Cupich: Deaths of mother, four daughters in fire have touched 'many hearts'

CHICAGO | When Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago presided at the funeral Mass for five members of the Espinosa family at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Chicago suburb of Des Plaines Feb. 10, gestures of comfort came from as far away as the Vatican. Pope Francis sent rosaries for family members who were mourning the loss of Nancy Cithlaly Zamudio, 25, and her daughters, Renata P. Espinosa, 6; Genesis Espinosa, 5; Allison Espinosa, 3; and Grace Espinosa, 2. All of them died in a house fire Jan. 27 in Des Plaines. The children's father was at work when the 104-year-old wood-frame duplex in Des Plaines caught fire, neighbors told media outlets. Investigators believe the fire was started by a space heater. Cardinal Cupich said the pope gave him the rosaries when the cardinal was in Rome two weeks ago. "He said he would like me to make sure that the family receives them as a way of showing his closeness to you," Cardinal Cupich said. "He would ask that you pray for him, because he also takes on himself the sufferings of the world, your suffering."

Biden reestablishes faith-based partnership office

WASHINGTON | President Joe Biden signed an executive order Feb. 14 reestablishing the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships as a means to work with religious and

secular organizations to help with COVID-19 and economic recovery and confront systemic racism. The office was established 20 years ago by President George W. Bush, who said the government can and should welcome religious and community organizations as partners. The Obama administration continued this initiative with work on preventing foreclosures, increasing the amount of summer meals served to children in need and helping communities with disaster recovery. Under the Trump administration, this office was vacant. President Donald Trump instead created the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives, led by the Pentecostal preacher Paula White. The group, according to its website, was a liaison for grassroots organizations, faith-based groups and the Department of Health and Human Services with a focus on "religious liberty in all HHS programs and initiatives." Melissa Rogers, who was executive director of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships during President Barack Obama's second term, from 2013 to 2017, will again take the helm as its executive director along with her role as senior director for faith and public policy in the White House Domestic Policy Council. Josh Dickson, White House senior adviser for public engagement, will serve as the office's deputy director.

Judge stops capacity limits on NY synagogues

BROOKLYN, N.Y. | A federal judge in Brooklyn Feb. 9 permanently blocked New York state capacity limits for worship at Orthodox synagogues in areas with high rates of COVID-19 infections. The permanent injunction applies to all of the houses of worship in these areas in the state and is one of the first in the country to stop percentage-

of-occupancy limits on worship attendance. Last year, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo placed restrictions on indoor worship services in areas with high COVID-19 rates to 10 people in the most affected areas and 25 people in slightly less affected areas. In her five-page order, U.S. District Judge Kiyo Matsumoto reversed a decision she made last October when she rejected the lawsuit filed by Jewish leaders who claimed the congregation size limits were unconstitutional. In her ruling, she cited a Feb. 5 Supreme Court decision that ordered California to allow indoor worship services to resume during the pandemic. Eric Rassbach, vice president and senior counsel at Becket, a religious liberty law firm, said in a Feb. 9 statement that Matsumoto's order is "good news for the synagogues, churches and other houses of worship of New York."

WORLD

Myanmar nuns show solidarity with anti-coup protesters

YANGON, Myanmar | Catholic nuns, priests and laypeople have joined protests in Buddhist-majority Myanmar following the Feb. 1 coup. Ucanews.com reported that hundreds of Catholics, including dozens of nuns, marched on the streets of Yangon Feb. 14 and recited prayers and the rosary. Youths held placards reading "Free Aung San Suu Kyi" and "We support CDM," the latter referring to the civil disobedience movement. Nuns from various congregations have shown solidarity with the people of Myanmar by marching on the streets, saying prayers at convents and offering snacks to protesters in Yangon and elsewhere, ucanews.com reported.

In the Christian stronghold of Kachin state, nuns stood at the entrance of a church compound while holding placards that read "No to dictatorship" and "Listen to the voices of people," while protesters swarmed the streets of Myitkyina, the state's capital city, Feb. 14. Nationwide anti-coup protests have intensified for nine consecutive days in Yangon, Mandalay, villages and the ethnic regions of Kachin and Chin states, ucanews.com reported.

Vatican City law abolishes 'in absentia' trials,

VATICAN CITY | Pope Francis approved a number of changes to Vatican City State's penal code and criminal justice proceedings, including the possibilities of reduced sentences, rehabilitation programs and community service sentenc-

POPE TO VISIT IRAQ



The ruins of Ur, Iraq, with the reconstructed Ziggurate in the background, are pictured in 1998. During his March 5-8 trip to Iraq, Pope Francis will visit Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, recognized as the patriarch of faith in one God by Jews, Christians and Muslims. (NORBERT SCHILLER | CNS)

ing, as well as no longer allowing trials "in absentia." The changes, announced by the Vatican Feb. 16, were made because the field of criminal justice requires "constant attention" so that norms and procedures can keep up with changing needs, particularly when old solutions are now "outdated," the papal document said. "For these reasons, following the process of an ongoing update dictated by changing awareness" over time, the pope approved changes to the Vatican City State penal code with several new articles. One allows for a sentence reduction of 45 to 120 days for each year already served by the convicted person when he or she "has behaved in such a way as to presume repentance and has successfully taken part in a treatment and rehabilitation program."

VATICAN

Anniversary of Christians martyred in Libya

VATICAN CITY | Marking the sixth anniversary of the beheading of 21 Christians on a beach in Libya, Pope Francis said they gave witness to Christ through their martyrdom. In a video message released Feb. 15 for an online event commemorating the "Day of Contemporary Martyrs," the pope said that while their brutal murder was a tragedy, it was also true that "from their simplicity, from their simple but consistent faith, they received the greatest gift a Christian can receive: bearing witness to Jesus Christ to the point of giving their life. They had gone to work abroad to support their families: ordinary men, fathers of families, men with the desire to have children; men with the dignity of workers, who not only seek

to bring home bread, but to bring it home with the dignity of work," he said. "And these men bore witness to Jesus Christ. Their throats slit by the brutality of ISIS, they died saying: 'Lord Jesus!' -- confessing the name of Jesus." The martyred Christians -- 20 Egyptian Copts and one Christian migrant from Ghana -- were beheaded in 2015 on a Libyan beach by the Islamic State group, which later released a gruesome video that sparked worldwide outrage.

Anticipated papal visit regarded as 'miracle'

BEIRUT | The largest Syriac Catholic congregation in the world is preparing physically and spiritually for Pope Francis' upcoming visit to Qaraqosh, Iraq. "Words can't describe how happy we are," Syriac Catholic Father Roni Momeka told Catholic News Service. "The people feel that it's a miracle that the pope will come here," Father Momeka said. "They are happy not only for the visit, but they are happy that Pope Francis is thinking about those people who are in pain, those people who lost everything, but who never lost their faith." Father Momeka said Qaraqosh is bustling with activity, the streets already awash with papal flags and banners in preparation for the pope's March 7 visit, part of his March 5-8 visit to Iraq. Parishioners have been busy cleaning and painting the interior of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, transforming the blackened interior to its original radiance for the pope's visit. The church, built by parishioners in the 1930s, had seating for 2,200 people. It was vandalized, desecrated and burned by the Islamic State. Pope Francis is scheduled to pray the Angelus there.



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Ashes mark beginning, not end, of new life, says theologian

CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY | Ash Wednesday and Lent are a time to recall that new life emerges from the ashes and that spring blossoms from the bleakness of winter, said a noted Italian theologian.

And when people fast from media overload, as Pope Francis has asked people to do for Lent, they should be directing their attention to the real people around them, Servite Father Ermes Ronchi told Vatican News Feb. 16.

Instead of being “glued” to the internet, “what if we were to look people in the eye the way we look at our phones, 50 times a day, looking at them with the same attentiveness and intensity, how many things would change? How many things would we discover?” he asked.

The Italian priest, who was chosen by Pope Francis to lead his annual Lenten retreat in 2016, talked with Vatican News about how to understand Lent and Ash Wednesday during a global pandemic, particularly when many people have already lost so much.

He recalled the natural cycles in farm life when wood ashes from heating homes over a long winter would be returned to the soil to provide it with important nutrients for



Pope Francis sprinkles ashes on the head of a priest during Ash Wednesday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Feb. 17, 2021. (GUGLIELMO MANGIAPANE, REUTERS | CNS)

the spring.

“Ashes are what is left when nothing is left, it is the bare minimum, the almost-nothing. And it is from here that one can and must begin again,” he said, rather than stopping in despair.

Ashes smudged or sprinkled on the faithful are then “not so much about ‘remember you must die,’ but ‘remember you must be simple and fruitful.’”

The Bible teaches “the economy of small things” in which there is

nothing better than to be “nothing” before God, he said.

“Do not be afraid of being fragile but think of Lent as the transformation from ashes to light, from what is leftover to fullness,” he said. “I see it as a time that is not penitential, but alive, not a time of mortification, but as revitalization. It is the time the seed is in the earth.”

For those who have suffered great loss during the pandemic, Father Ronchi said that strain and struggle also leads to new fruit, like a gardener who prunes trees “not for penance,” but “to bring them back to the essential” and stimulate new growth and energy.

“We are living in a time that can bring us back to the essential, rediscovering what is permanent in our life and what is fleeting. Therefore, this moment is a gift to be more fruitful, not to castigate.”

No matter what measures or restrictions may be in place due to the pandemic, people still have all the tools they need, which no virus can

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ASK IF ONES LIFE IS CENTERED ON GOD

VATICAN CITY | Lent is a time to reconsider the path one is taking in life and to finally answer God's invitation to return to him with one's whole heart, Pope Francis said.

“Lent is not just about the little sacrifices we make, but about discerning where our hearts are directed,” he said, “toward God or toward myself?”

The pope's remarks came in his homily at Mass Feb. 17 for Ash Wednesday, which included the blessing and distribution of ashes, marking the beginning of Lent for Latin-rite Catholics.

Because of ongoing measures in place to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, the Mass and distribution of ashes took place with a congregation of little more than 100 people at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica.

Pope Francis did not do the traditional walk from the Church of St. Anselm to the Basilica of Santa Sabina on Rome's Aventine Hill to prevent large crowds of people from gathering along the route.

In St. Peter's Basilica, the pope received ashes on his head from Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of the basilica, and he distributed ashes to about three dozen cardinals, as well as the priests and deacons assisting him at the Mass. In his homily, the pope said one must bow to receive ashes sprinkled on the crown of the head, which reflects the “humble descent” one makes in reflecting on one's life, sins and relationship with God.

“Lent is a journey of return to God,” especially when most people live each day ignoring or delaying their response to God's invitation to pray and do something for others.

“It is a time to reconsider the path we are taking, to find the route that leads us home and to rediscover our profound relationship with God, on whom everything depends,” he said.

“The journey of Lent is an exodus from slavery to freedom,” he said, noting the easy temptations along that journey, including yearning for the past, or hindered by “unhealthy attachments, held back by the seductive snares of our sins, by the false security of money and appearances, by the paralysis of our discontents. To embark on this journey, we have to unmask these illusions.”

The way back to God, he said, starts with understanding, like the prodigal son, how “we have ended up with empty hands and an unhappy heart” after squandering God's gifts “on paltry things, and then with seeking God's forgiveness through confession.”

The pope again reminded confessors that they must be like the father in the story of the prodigal son and not use “a whip,” but open their arms in a welcoming embrace.

“The journey is not based on our own strength. Heartfelt conversion, with the deeds and practices that express it, is possible only if it begins with the primacy of God's work” and through his grace, the pope said. ■

take away: charity, tenderness and forgiveness, he said.

“It's true that this Easter will be marked by fragility, many crucifixes, but what is being asked of

me is a sign of charity,” he added. “Jesus came to bring a revolution of tenderness and forgiveness without bounds. These are the two things that build up universal fraternity.” ■

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Pope: God wants to open hearts, forgive, heal

CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY | The Gospel story of Jesus healing the leper illustrates how nothing will stop God from tenderly and compassionately drawing close to people who want to be healed and saved, Pope Francis said.

"Each one of us can experience wounds, failure, suffering, selfishness that make us close ourselves off from God and others," the pope said. "Sin closes us in on ourselves because of shame, because of hu-

miliation, but God wants to open our heart."

"Jesus announces to us that God is not an idea or an abstract doctrine, but God is the one who 'contaminates' himself with our human woundedness and is not afraid to come into contact with our wounds," the pope said Feb. 14, commenting on the day's Gospel reading before praying the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter's Square.

On a brilliantly sunny, but frigid day, Pope Francis asked people in the square to give a round of ap-

plause to priests who model God's closeness, tenderness and compassion in the way they administer the sacrament of reconciliation.

Such priests, he said, are able to draw people back to God — "people who feel that they are nothing, who feel they are laid low because of their sins — with tenderness, with compassion, good confessors who do not have a whip in their hands, but just welcome, listen and say that God is good, and that God always forgives, that God does not get tired of forgiving."

In fact, the pope said, the story in Mark's Gospel (Mk 1:40-45) of Jesus healing the leper depicts both Jesus and the man with Hansen's disease breaking the law.

"Lepers were considered impure and, according to the prescriptions of the law, they had to remain outside of inhabited centers," the pope said. "They were excluded from every human, social and religious relationship" and were banned from the synagogue.

But, he said, Jesus allows the man to approach and "is moved even to the point of extending his hand and touching him. This was unthinkable at that time."

"This is how he fulfills the good news he proclaims: God draws near to our lives, he is moved to compassion because of the fate of wounded humanity and comes to break down every barrier that prevents us from being in relationship with him, with others and with ourselves," the pope said.

Jesus did not stop at saying some-



The crowd in St. Peter's Square attends the Angelus led by Pope Francis from the window of his studio overlooking the square at the Vatican Feb. 14, 2021. (VATICAN MEDIA | CNS)

thing to the man, but he touched him, the pope noted. "To touch with love means to establish a relationship, to enter into communion, to become involved in the life of another person even to the point of sharing their wounds."

"With that gesture," he said, "Jesus reveals that God, who is not indifferent, does not keep himself at a 'safe distance.' Rather, he draws near out of compassion and touches our life to heal it with tenderness. It is God's style: nearness, compassion and tenderness."

After reciting the Angelus prayer, Pope Francis noted it was Valentine's Day and offered his prayers

and blessings for couples in love, especially engaged couples.

He also used the occasion to publicly praise the government of Colombia for granting temporary protection status to Venezuelan migrants who have fled the chaos and extreme poverty in their country.

Colombia, he said, is "welcoming, protecting and integrating" the Venezuelan migrants. "It is not a super wealthy, developed country that is doing this — no, this is being done by a country that has many problems in development, poverty and peace," he said. Even so, "they have had the courage to look at those migrants and to create this status." ■

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Reestablish your covenant with God

Sunday, Feb. 21

First Sunday of Lent

Gn 9:8-15; Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

This Sunday's first reading (Genesis 9:8-15) describes the Lord's covenant with Noah and his sons, after the flood. The sign of this covenant, a sign that struggles to recover its Scriptural meaning today, is the rainbow.

Lent is about reestablishing our covenant with God, a covenant that was forged by the Cross of Christ. As St. Peter says in our second reading, "Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit" (3:18). This is the new and definitive covenant between God and human beings. This covenant is made effective for each of us in the waters of Baptism, a prefigurement of which St. Peter saw in the waters of the great flood (cf. 3:21).

Why do we need to reestablish a covenant with God? Because in sin we have offended against that most important relationship. We have not loved with the love with which Jesus loved us on the Cross. We have failed in our relationships with God and our brothers and sisters. We have not always lived with what St. Peter describes as a "clear conscience" (3:22). In the penitential practices of Lent (prayer, fasting, almsgiving), we open our hearts to receive the love that is God, the love God calls us to live.

The image of entering the desert with Jesus, of actually being "driven" into the desert by the Spirit (cf. Mark 1:12) may seem a bit harsh this year. It may seem as if we've been spending a whole year in the desert already. Entering more deeply into the reality of our current moment with Jesus does not mean to suffer more, though. It means to seek to join ourselves and all that is happening in our lives and in our world more intimately with Jesus, precisely as he faces his temptations. As we enter the desert with Jesus, we can give space to God to talk to us, in the

very needs that have marked perhaps the strangest year in memory. This time allows us to notice more the ways in which he has been with us in every moment of this year, perhaps especially in those moments when we felt most alone or afraid. The Father has never left our side, as He did not leave His Divine Son's side for those forty days. How powerful it could be to recognize this more deeply this Lent.

I mentioned the rainbow earlier, the sign of the first covenant between God and humanity. Later I mentioned Baptism, the sign of the final and definitive covenant of the Cross. That covenant then finds its most perfect expression in the Eucharist, where we enter into Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ. If during Lent we can open our eyes to the saving action of God, perhaps we will be able to open our eyes and see how all of His promises are still being fulfilled, even in the midst of a world that struggles to see this amazing truth.

The next time you look up at the sky after a rain shower, I invite you to recognize in the rainbow something beyond a natural phenomenon or a modern political symbol. Look at the sky with eyes of faith and see what Noah saw. See, through physical reality, the action of God, the sign of God's unending love for us.

If we are capable of seeing the presence of God in the rainbow, perhaps we will be able to see it when we enter church, especially if we are just returning after not being able to go to Mass for a long time. While we may not be able to bless ourselves with Holy Water in most churches, the very act of entering the church building is a reminder that we belong to the Body of Christ, who died for us and rose again, that we might enter into His Body by Baptism and share in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

With the eyes of faith we can see the constant action of God, his permanent faithfulness to his covenant with us. When we recognize and trust in God's faithfulness, nothing can make us afraid, no temptation can draw us away from Him; we can recommit ourselves to living out this covenant in faithfulness. The rainbow is a sign that God never abandons us. The water of Baptism and the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist are signs of the love by which He has saved us in His Son. May we open our eyes to see the truth and thus be able to live it. ■

Father Alfredo Hernandez is Rector/President of St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boyton Beach.



SUNDAY WORD
Father Alfredo Hernández

SCRIPTURE readings

Thursday, Feb. 18

Dt 30:15-20; Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6; Lk 9:22-25

Friday, Feb. 19

Is 58:1-9a; Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19; Mt 9:14-15

Saturday, Feb. 20

Is 58:9b-14; Ps 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Lk 5:27-32

Sunday, Feb. 21

First Sunday of Lent

Gn 9:8-15; Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

Monday, Feb. 22

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, Apostle

1 Pt 5:1-4; Ps 23:1-3a, 4, 5, 6; Mt 16:13-19

Tuesday, Feb. 23

Is 55:10-11; Ps 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19; Mt 6:7-15

Wednesday, Feb. 24

Jon 3:1-10; Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Lk 11:29-32

Thursday, Feb. 25

Est C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Ps 138:1-2ab, 2cde-3, 7c-8;

Mt 7:7-12

Friday, Feb. 26

Ez 18:21-28; Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-7a, 7bc-8; Mt 5:20-26

Saturday, Feb. 27

Memorial of St. Gregory of Narek, abbot and doctor of the Church

Wis 7:7-10, 15-16; Ps 37:3-4, 5-6, 30-31; Mt 7:21-29

Sunday, Feb. 28

Second Sunday of Lent

Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19; Rom 8:31b-34; Mk 9:2-10

The 'Quality of Life' Error

During "serious illness conversations," some doctors will ply their patients with this question: "What is your minimally acceptable quality of life?"

Behind the question can be the implication that if patients are experiencing a low quality of life, their medical treatments can be discontinued because their life has become "no longer worth living."

This can even become a shorthand to justify actions like physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. Making quality of life assessments about ourselves or others can lead us to devalue the gift of human life by insisting it must have a certain amount of "quality" before it can be deemed "meaningful" or "worthwhile."

The clearest rebuttal of the "Quality of Life" error I've come across was from a 64-year-old retired Boeing computer programmer named John Peyton (1945-2009). He lived in Kent, Washington, and had an unusually aggressive form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The disease made him totally dependent on Patricia, his wife of 40 years. She dressed him, fed him, and regularly shifted his body position in the living room recliner where he spent his declining months.

As Peyton's once-strong voice gradually began to fade away, he continued to use it publicly to oppose and lobby against Initiative 1000, the assisted suicide initiative in Washington.

When he was interviewed by Laura Ingraham of Fox News, he said, "I'm one of those people who is somewhat of a target of the initiative and I don't know how we as a society could really consider

making doctors into killers."

Laura countered: "John, I think a lot of people who are for this type of assisted suicide would say, 'Look, what about the quality of life?' 'Look, you know, people suffering like you — what kind of quality of life do you really have?' What do you say to those people?"

His reply was as brilliant as it was simple:

"I have a marvelous quality of life! Right now I am totally dependent. I can do nothing for myself. I'm effectively paralyzed. But I have a family. I have friends. I have my church community. I have loving support all around me. I don't understand how anyone could deny that I

have a very high quality of life, and it gets me to understand and be compassionate toward those without the support that I have. Rather than giving them the temptation to kill themselves, we should be trying to figure out how to help them to have the quality of life I enjoy."

Peyton's answer cuts to the heart of the matter: if anyone who is sick or dying is facing a low quality of life, we should take steps to raise and improve it. His story also reminds us how the one-sided category of "quality of life" can easily tempt us in the wrong direction when it comes to basic moral duties owed to our loved ones in compromised states. Instead of making quality of life judgments about people, we should be making "quality of treatment" judgments for those who are ailing and vulnerable, and perhaps "quality of help" judgments against ourselves.

As such, our focus should be on the benefits and burdens of a proposed medical intervention rather than on trying to impose our own conclusion that certain individuals no longer have enough value

or meaning in their lives to merit receiving a particular treatment. Their humanity is violated if they are treated according to their functionality or quality of life, rather than according to their personal dignity.

Of course everyone has a certain natural fear or hesitation when it comes to living in a disabled or compromised state. We may also be afraid of "being a burden to others." When we acknowledge that the gift of life has "absolute value," that doesn't mean we must do absolutely everything scientifically available to maintain it, but it does mean that we should exercise good stewardship over it, making use of ordinary means of treatment and receiving supportive care, even in the face of imminent decline.

It also means the decision to refuse or stop a particular medical treatment should be based on the judgment that the treatment itself is extraordinary, that is to say, it offers minimal benefit or is unduly burdensome. It should not be because we conclude that someone's life itself lacks value and needs to end.

Individuals struggling with grave ailments, even though they may be very compromised and unable to act as their own decision makers, remain persons of great moral worth. They contribute to the common good simply by being, rather than by doing or choosing. Moreover, they continually call each of us to a higher and more beautiful standard of full acceptance, loving support and authentic care, even and especially in the midst of very challenging medical circumstances. They raise the bar for us and we should respond by elevating their quality of life.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia.

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