

Saint Francis Solanus



APRIL 2015

“Let the Children Come to Me” *Children’s Liturgy of the Word*

Every Sunday from September through May, children from kindergarten through fourth grade are invited to participate in a part of the Mass all their own – the Liturgy of the Word for Children. As the pitter-patter of little feet can be heard making their way towards the sacristy, the words of Jesus come to mind: “Let the children come to me... the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

Carol Seifert, the Director of Religious Education, oversees the planning, scheduling and materials. For Carol, the effort for their children is well worth it.

“It gives them an opportunity to have a special time in the Mass to talk about what Jesus is saying to them,” she says. “They’re excited to talk about the Scripture and share their ideas.”



The Liturgy of the Word for Children mirrors parts of the Mass taking place in the main church. Using a children’s lectionary produced by Children Celebrate, the Sunday readings are shared in a language accessible to children. Volunteer teachers lead a short dis-

cussion. After inviting the children to share their own intercessions, it’s time to rejoin their families for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Though parents and children are separated for a portion of the Mass, this doesn’t mean that the experience of the liturgy is not shared. Each Sun-

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Cultivate Your Personal Garden for Christ this Spring

Everyone loves springtime. The weather is warmer and beautiful flowers are blooming all around us.

But anyone with a beautiful garden will attest that the flowers do not magically appear as if the season change itself miraculously makes the flowers bloom. Beautiful flowers and lush gardens are the result of the gardener's hard work.

Imagine that a man is given some flower seeds. The man then buries the seeds in the ground and leaves them on their own. As the months pass and rain falls, some seeds may receive enough nourishment to bloom. But simply burying seeds in the ground will hardly make for a gorgeous garden. Rather, if the man truly wants to enjoy many beautiful flowers, there is much care and work ahead. Recognizing the hidden beauty within these simple seeds, he must cultivate the ground, plant the seeds in a solid foundation, then water and fertilize them throughout the year. Only then will he see the proper fruit these seeds were made to bear.

This simple illustration speaks to the heart of us this season — not only as we look around at the

Just like springtime flowers we now enjoy, our time, talents and treasure need to be cared for. Our gifts need to be cultivated and nourished. Only then will we see them for what they are — wonderful gifts given by God meant for His greater glory.

flowers, but more importantly as we reflect on the springtime of the Church. We are celebrating the great feast of Easter when, through His death and resurrection, Christ offers us the greatest gift of all — eternal life with Him forever. This celebration leads us to reflect on the many gifts God has given us in this life and the fruit they will bear, especially as we look to life eternal.

He has given each of us a multitude of gifts so that we can better serve Him and bring others to Him. Do we notice the hidden potential of our gifts? Do we see them, like the

seed, as seemingly small yet so full of fruit? Everything we have — our time, talents and treasure — is a gift from the Lord. Do we accept gifts in gratitude, then put them to use by cultivating and nourishing them so they will bear the proper fruit?

Just like springtime flowers that we enjoy, our time, talents and treasure need to be cared for. Our gifts need to be cultivated and nourished. Only then will we see them for what they are — wonderful gifts given by God meant for His greater glory.

Like the seeds, if we use our gifts flippantly, we may see some fruits here and there. But we are called to so much more — we are called to build a beautiful garden. We are called to offer God the most beautiful flowers of all.

This season, as we look at all the beautiful flowers around us and enjoy God's creation, let us think about the seeds in our own lives. Ask yourself if you have accepted the gifts God has given you — your time, talents and treasure — and have cultivated and cared for them properly. Or, do they just sit dormant within you yearning to bloom?

A Letter From Our Pastor

Celebrating the Joy of Christ's Resurrection

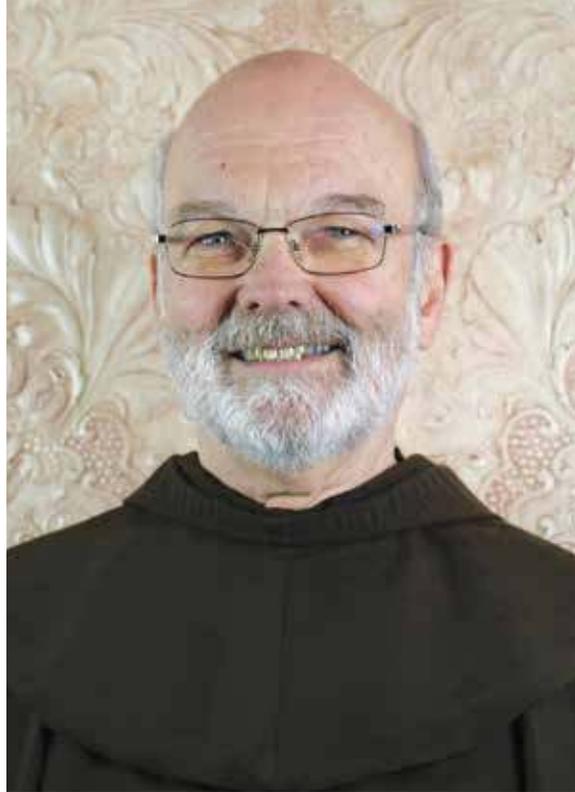
Dear Parishioners,

There are many aspects of the Easter celebration that bring joy to the Christian. Not only do we rejoice in Christ's resurrection, as He conquered death, but we also rejoice because of the eternal reward we gain through it. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (654) puts it, "The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life."

This new life that we speak of is a life of abundance and freedom found not only in our current existence, but also in our eternal life in heaven with God. In a beautiful mystery, Christ's resurrection is the source of our own future resurrection. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote: "For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection" (Rom 6:5).

When Christ overcame the grave, He opened the gates of heaven that had never been opened before. Through His resurrection, we have the opportunity to be united with God in eternal bliss and happiness. What greater grounds for thanksgiving can there be than this Easter hope? We should sing with joy about this promise from God!

But how can we best express that joy? How can we thank God for the greatest gift that we could ever be given? We can join in worship, praising God in our



words and deeds, and share the Good News of His victory with our family, friends and neighbors. Most importantly, we respond to His graciousness with a gift of our own – a gift of our very self. When we give our time, talent and treasure to God and to others in service, we make a concrete gesture of thanksgiving in return to the One who is most deserving of our love.

This Easter season, let us live out Jesus' reassurance that "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). Despite the challenges of our daily lives and the struggles we may be going through, Christ has won for us eternal victory, giving us a hope for a better tomorrow and peace that will never end. That, my brothers and sisters, is reason to rejoice.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, O.F.M." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Don Blaeser, O.F.M.
Pastor

This new life that we speak of is a life of abundance and freedom found not only in our current existence, but also in our eternal life in heaven with God. In a beautiful mystery, Christ's resurrection is the source of our own future resurrection.

Using Talents to Enhance *Flower C*



Every Catholic church is a house of God. God invites and welcomes all of us into His house, and so the church itself should be inviting and welcoming. The members of the St. Francis Flower Committee work hard throughout the year to make it so.

“It’s more inviting when you go into a place and it’s got a little bit of flowers and a little bit of color,” Doris Karhoff, head of the Flower Committee. “Life is there. Instead of walking into a plain, ordinary place, it lifts your spirits. God has created all this glory, and we have incorporated it into His church to give glory to Him and all He’s done for us. I love working with the other women on the Flower Committee. I don’t think there’s ever a time when I see the flowers not looking nice.”

Doris and the other members of the Flower Committee are responsible for maintaining all of the flowers, plants and other decorations in the church. This is something they do throughout the year, but they are especially active during certain seasons in the liturgical calendar, such as Advent and Lent, and for major feasts like Christmas and Easter. At these times, it is their job to make the necessary changes to the church decor to reflect the spirituality of the liturgical seasons.

For the season of Lent, the members of the committee removed all flowers from the inside of the church to reflect the sacrificial theme of the Lenten season. Then with Easter, the Flower Committee fills the church with beautiful and colorful flowers

and decor in keeping with the renewed joy of the resurrection.

“When Easter comes, you are really ready for the color, the light and realizing the beauty that is there when you haven’t had it for six weeks,” Doris says. “It lifts everybody’s spirits and makes them thankful for what we do have.”

These transitions to the visual components of the church serve to highlight and enhance the changes in the liturgical season. They remind the congregation to pay attention to the differences in the Mass, like the readings. Taking part in this ministry is also very rewarding for the members of the Flower Committee.

“It’s a neat experience of you working with someone that really loves neat flowers and a lot of color, and you learn a lot about the people you meet,” Doris says. “I find it rewarding when I come for the service that I was a part of making it look nice.”

For these servants of the parish, beautifying the house of God is a way of giving glory to Him.

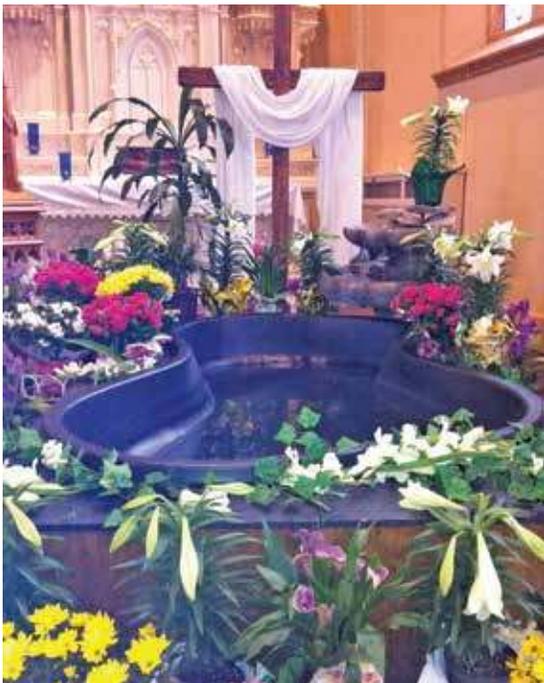
“It really makes them feel like they’re part of the parish,” Doris says. “They’ve got to decorate the altar, and it’s God’s place. By having fresh flowers, they feel that they are more a part of the Church and they’ve done something. We are members of the Church, but this is God’s house. It’s like a special guest — you want it to look nice when you come in.”

For more information on the Flower Committee, please call Doris Karhoff at 217-224-1516.

Enhance the Liturgy Committee



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DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

AND THE CHAPLET OF DIVINE MERCY

History

In the 1930s, Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska of the Most Blessed Sacrament, a Sister of Our Lady of Mercy, received a message from the Lord that she was to live her life as a model of Christ's merciful love and spread Christ's mercy throughout the world. She proceeded to offer up all of her personal sufferings in atonement for the sins of others. She kept a secret diary in which she wrote of God's mercy, as well as about her special devotion to Mary Immaculate and to the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, which gave her strength. Sr. Faustina's diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, serves as the handbook for the devotion to the Divine Mercy. In it, we read of the message of mercy that she received from Christ.

On April 30, 2000, Sr. Faustina Kowalska was canonized by Pope John Paul II. Then, on May 23, 2000, the Congregation for Divine Worship decreed that "throughout the world, the second Sunday of Easter will receive the name Divine Mercy Sunday, a perennial invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that humankind will experience in the years to come."

On Divine Mercy Sunday — occurring this year on April 12 — all parishioners are encouraged to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, always remembering and practicing the essential "ABCs" of Divine Mercy — ask for mercy, be merciful to others, and completely trust in Jesus.

Format of the Divine Mercy Chaplet

"Chaplet" simply refers to the prayers counted on a rosary. The Lord said to St. Faustina, "You will recite this chaplet on the beads of the Rosary in the following Manner:"

Begin with:

One "Our Father," one "Hail Mary," and the "I Believe in God."

On the "Our Father Beads" say:

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

On the "Hail Mary Beads" say:

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

In conclusion, three times recite these words:

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

"I want the whole world to know my infinite mercy. I want to give unimaginable graces to those who trust in my mercy" (*Diary*, 687).

Dying He Destroyed Our Death, Rising He Restored Our Life

*“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead” – Apostle’s Creed*

As we have come to the end of our Lenten journey toward Easter, let us take a moment to meditate on three pivotal lines from the ancient creed, which comprise the central events of our redemption.

Far from being a mere myth or legend, in Jerusalem around the year 30 A.D., Jesus Christ – the Son of God made man – was tortured at the hands of the Romans. He was flogged, beaten, spit upon, and crowned with thorns. He was made to carry the cross through the crowded streets to Golgotha and, once there, He was crucified – He was nailed to a cross and died. Just as someday we will each be laid in our graves, Jesus was laid in His.

The most obvious question that confronts the observer of this horrific reality is “why?” Luckily, Christ made the impetus for His self-sacrifice quite clear: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14-15).

The reasons Christ died on the cross are twofold, one negative and one positive. The negative cause is sin. Only in witnessing the cost of redemption – the death of the Son of God – can we begin to comprehend the profound magnitude of sin: “You were bought with a price,” says St. Paul (1 Cor 6:20).

Conversely, Christ willingly accepted the cross because of love. St. John famously says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Uniting these two causes, St. Paul says, “God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

In His limitless compassion, Christ entered into the fullness of human suffering – physical torment, emotional agony and utter isolation – so that He might share complete solidarity with mankind. Accordingly, His passion and death not only accomplished our redemption, but by the cross He also showed us the way to true discipleship. For Christ taught

His disciples long before His crucifixion, “if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).

Christ’s is the final and perfect covenant between God and man, and it is a covenant of love, with Christ Himself as its high priest. Nevertheless, this covenant is not based on love as popular culture conceives of it, but love as Christ displayed it: “The way we came to know love was that He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16).

Joined with the passion, Christ’s resurrection is the key to the entire Gospel – for in rising from the dead, Jesus proved true His bold promises. He had prophesied to the apostles, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again” (Jn 10:18). The resurrection vindicates this promise and validates His teaching and miracles.

Furthermore, Christ, “the firstborn from the dead,” opened the door to eternal life and to new creation (Col 1:18). Out of the darkness of despair, the scattered and frightened disciples saw the risen Christ and were renewed and transformed. Filled with faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior, they evangelized the known world.

St. Paul summarizes the centrality of the redemptive power of the Easter Triduum with his characteristic zeal: “If Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:14-17).

This Easter, let us respond to the glory of Christ’s resurrection by exclaiming, as St. Thomas the Apostle did, “My Lord and my God!” And may each of us be filled with faith in God of our salvation, hope in the rewards God has won for us, and love for the Lord who has deigned to bestow them on us.

St. Francis Solanus

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Children's Liturgy of the Word *continued from front cover*

day, children receive an activities flier to bring home.

"Parents are the first educators of their children," Carol says. "The flier would be a great way that parents can connect with them."

One of the volunteer teachers, Jayna Klauser, is the mother of two children who attend. She notes how the program benefits her own children.

"They pay more attention when they're back there," Jayna says. "My daughter always comes out with something. You walk out of church and she says something from the reading and you think, 'Wow, you really picked up on that!'"

Focusing on the key elements of the Gospel not only simplifies the message for the children, but it also reaffirms the essential truths of the Christian life for the adults.

"I laugh sometimes and say, not only does it bring it down to the kid's level, it brings it down to my level!" Jayna

says. "Kids are open and they believe and they're good at heart. You see how giving and loving they are. It's a helpful reminder to me that I need to be more like that."

Holly Hummel has been a volunteer teacher for the Liturgy of the Word for Children for seven years. Though both her children have since outgrown the program, she continues to help.

"It takes the whole parish community to make Mass what it is," Holly says. "Without that help, without volunteers or stewardship, it's not going to work. When I'm back with the kids, it's just amazing. It's rewarding when you walk out and know they're getting it."

If you are interested in learning more or helping with the Liturgy of the Word for Children, please contact Carol Seifert in the parish office at 217-222-4077, or via e-mail at cseifert57@gmail.com.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 a.m.

Weekday Mass: M, T, W, Th, F, 6:30 a.m. | M, T, W, Th, F, S, 8:00 a.m. | W, F, 8:35 a.m. during school year

Confessions: Saturdays 8:30 a.m., 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Holy Days of Obligation: Vigil 5:30 p.m.; Holy Day: 6:30 a.m.; 8:35 a.m. on school days; 8:00 a.m. during summer; 5:30 p.m.