

Saint Francis Solanus



APRIL 2019

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS INTO THE CHURCH *A Deeper Look at the Easter Vigil Mass*

One of the most beautiful traditions in the Catholic Church is the Easter Vigil liturgy. Following the simplicity and fasting of Lent, the solemn reading of the passion on Palm Sunday, and the remembrance of Christ's suffering on Good Friday, the Easter Vigil Mass represents the reawakening of hope and light as we celebrate Christ's resurrection. It is also this Mass that allows us, as parishioners, to share in a very special step in the faith journey of our parish's catechumens and candidates as they receive their Sacraments of Initiation.

As Catholics, we are truly blessed to have the opportunity to come together in worship in such a momentous way each Easter season.

"The Easter Vigil Mass is also known as the Great Vigil of Easter or the Paschal Vigil," says Mike Holbrook, Director of Religious Education at St. Francis Solanus. "It is the most important liturgy of the entire year, and its importance lies in its rich history going back to the very beginning of the Church, when the Church was underground and they would welcome new members each year at the Vigil Mass. There is just so much about it that lends to its beauty and nobleness over all the other Masses throughout the year."

Considering the great importance of this liturgy in the life of the Church, it is not surprising that many sacramentals are used during the Easter Vigil — fire, water, anointing oils, and of course, the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

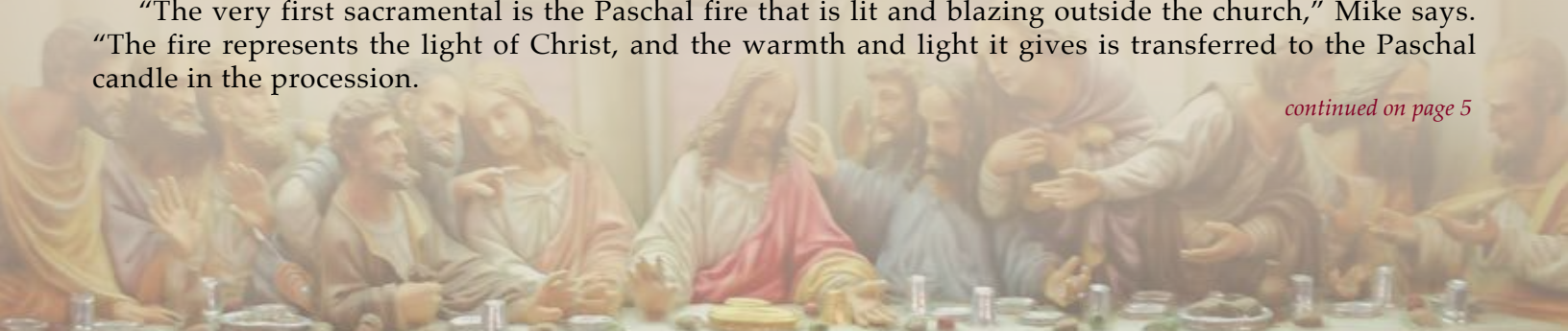
All of these sacramentals come together to draw the faithful even more deeply into the beauty and mystery of life in Christ.

"The very first sacramental is the Paschal fire that is lit and blazing outside the church," Mike says. "The fire represents the light of Christ, and the warmth and light it gives is transferred to the Paschal candle in the procession."



The Paschal fire is lit at last year's Easter Vigil.

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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 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 Easter with Gratitude

Dear Parishioners,

Easter Sunday arrives later this year — April 21. The method for determining the date of Easter was settled by the ancient Church according to a complicated formula that allows it to fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25. However, most of us are content simply to look it up on a liturgical calendar!

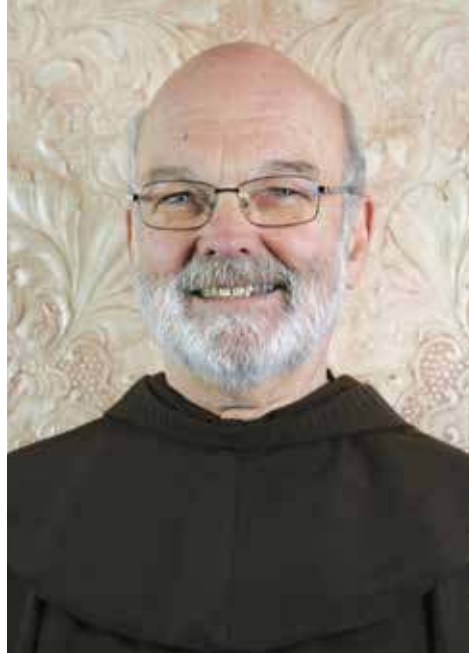
One feature at this year's Easter celebration will be a dramatic contrast from what we have experienced in the winter months — the days will be noticeably longer.

As a matter of fact, the English word "Lent" is related to the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "to lengthen," for spring is the season when the days grow longer. Even though most Americans do not live in rural settings or agricultural environments like our ancestors did, we still find joy in the longer days that contrast with the early nightfall that we experienced at Christmas. So when Lent is over and Easter arrives, our spirits naturally delight as we leave the winter behind.

Don't get me wrong — I am not saying that Easter is some sort of spring festival. The central theme of the Christian festival of Easter is clear. It celebrates what happened once for all almost 2,000 years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross and was raised back to life on the third day by God the Father. This event took place during the Jewish observance of Passover, which comes during the spring, which is why we celebrate Easter then.

So, then, we have two reasons to celebrate at Easter. Primary, of course, is our yearly remembrance of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, Satan and death. But we can also rejoice in the coming of spring, which melts the snows of winter and brings us beautiful flowers in bloom.

In its pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic



Bishops gives a definition of who a Christian steward is. It has several parts, but the first noted aspect is that a Christian steward is "one who receives God's gifts gratefully" (9). The bishops don't distinguish between gifts from God that are spiritual and ones that are material.

After all, "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). The first step in becoming a good steward is to receive what God gives, to recognize that these gifts come from God, and to be grateful for them.

So then, as we celebrate Easter with gratitude for what God continues to do for us in both the

material and spiritual spheres, we can resolve to use all we have received — the time, the talent and the treasure entrusted to us, the beauty of the natural world, and the hope of eternal life — as stewards who use them for God's glory and the welfare of His people.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, 2/21". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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

STATIONS OF THE CROSS HELP CO

As we proceed through the solemn season of Lent, one way we can truly prepare for the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter is by taking part in the long-standing devotion of the Stations of the Cross.

Stations of the Cross here at St. Francis are offered at 5:30 p.m. each Friday during Lent. Taking part is not an obligation — there is no “should” about our taking part.

“The Stations of the Cross are good to do because they depict the passion of Jesus and all He went through,” Fr. Don Blaeser says. “So we pray and meditate on His suffering He endured in order to save us and forgive us.”

Although the Stations of the Cross have been a part of Catholic tradition for many years, there has been change. Many parishes now add a 15th station — the resurrection.



The beautiful sculpted Stations of the Cross here at St. Francis Solanus help enhance our prayer experience during this devotion.

“The Stations are now incomplete if they don't remind us of Christ's resurrection,” Fr. Don says. “The 15th station reminds us that suffering will mean something. As good as the Stations of the Cross are, they need to point in the direction of Jesus's resurrection.”

To better understand how and why we pray the Stations of the Cross, Fr. Don offers their historical background.

“The Stations of the Cross go back to the 15th and 16th centuries,” he says. “St. Francis of Assisi built outdoor shrines, and this was the genesis of the Stations of the Cross.”

Another Franciscan, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, a town in northern Italy, who lived between 1676 and 1751, developed a devotion to the Stations of the Cross and the importance of their message.

“Following St. Francis of Assisi, St. Leonard traveled all over and tried to promote the Stations of the Cross as a devotion,” Fr. Don says. “It is said he set up 571 Stations of the Cross in his travels. And it is due to him that they became so popular. And now you don't go into a Catholic Church without seeing the Stations of the Cross. He was a Franciscan friar — so here at St. Francis Solanus we are proud of him!”

“When we pray the Stations, we draw a connection between what Jesus went through and the events of our lives today. When Jesus fell the first time, we can recall when we had suffering or when we fell from grace. There are different ways we can relate the Stations to our own personal experiences and appreciate what Jesus went through. We're not alone in suffering. While we can relate the Stations to our personal lives, the highlight of the practice today is ending with the resurrection.” — Fr. Don Blaeser

CONNECT US TO CHRIST'S SUFFERING

When we take part in the Stations of the Cross, we are able to better appreciate what Jesus did for us, and thereby deepen our faith and make our celebration of Easter more meaningful.

"When we pray the Stations, we draw a connection between what Jesus went through and the events of our lives today," Fr. Don says. "When Jesus fell the first time, we can recall when we had suffering or when we fell from grace. There are different ways we can relate the Stations to our own personal experiences and appreciate what Jesus went through. We're not alone in suffering. While we can relate the Stations to our personal lives, the highlight of the practice today is ending with the resurrection."

If attending the Stations of the Cross at church is not possible, we can also pray the Stations at home.

"Just have the Stations of the Cross booklet and pray with it," Fr. Don says. "There is no reason why you can't do it at home."

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The Easter Vigil Mass *continued from front cover*

"During the Sacraments of Initiation, you'll see the use of the Oil of Catechumens and the Sacred Chrism," Mike adds. "Oil is a symbol of royalty, of a commissioning, of being sent forth. The white garment given to the newly baptized symbolizes the pureness of their soul, and the waters of Baptism symbolize the dying and rising to new life. Of course, the bread and wine that are consecrated become the Body and Blood of Christ."

In addition to the various sacramentals used at the Vigil Mass, God's unbroken covenant with His people is also brought to the forefront through the readings from the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis, that recall the highlights of our salvation history.

Mike encourages all parishioners to come experience this beautiful and inspiring liturgy. The best way, of course, to maximize our worship experience at the Easter Vigil is to prepare ourselves spiritually during the preceding weeks of Lent.

"If you have kept Lent with your heart and done some fasting and done some spiritual exercises, that will get you ready for the Easter Vigil," Mike says. "It's the period of Lent leading up to the Vigil that will prepare you to enter into this liturgy."

This year, St. Francis Solanus is thrilled to welcome six adults and two children into the Church. We hope parishioners will consider participating in this beautiful Mass as a wonderful way to enrich their own spiritual lives while welcoming the new Church members into our faith family.

"What I always look forward to the most at the Easter Vigil is being there with the candidates and catechumens after they have been fully initiated or baptized," Mike says. "I love to see the joy in their faces and talk with them afterwards. That's what is happening at the Vigil — we're bringing new people into the fold and sharing in their happiness and everything they're experiencing."

Steadfast in Faith and Devotion

St. Catherine of Siena

On April 29, we celebrate the feast day of a doctor of the Church — one who remained absolutely devoted to living her life for Christ, even in the face of familial misunderstanding in her youth, and through societal opposition and turmoil during her later years. As stewards in our fast-paced, highly technical — and often fractured — world, we can always look to the life and example of St. Catherine of Siena, and strive to remain steadfast in our faith while facing our own modern-day challenges.

Born in mid-14th-century Italy to a large family, and in the midst of a plague outbreak, St. Catherine of Siena was her parents' 25th child, although half of her siblings did not survive through childhood. Young Catherine resisted her family's desire for her to marry — she even went so far as to begin fasting and cutting her hair short in protest. Her parents eventually relented, as Catherine strived to humbly serve her own family, treating her own father as Jesus, her mother as Mary, and her brothers as the apostles.

Such was Catherine's desire to remain in service to her own family that instead of entering a convent, she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic at age 18. This enabled her to continue serving her family at home, even as she was part of a religious society. In time, she learned to read and began giving her family's own possessions to those in need — even though her parents didn't necessarily approve of her entirely altruistic approach to service.

Continuing with her faithful devotion as part of the Third Order of St. Dominic, Catherine developed a following of her own, as she wrote letters offering spiritual encouragement and instruction. Controversy would ensue, as her writings began to comment on public matters through her firm lens of faith.

In the midst of these spiritual developments, at age 21, Catherine underwent a profound change, as she experienced what she called her "mystical marriage to Christ." Through this experience, she was directed to help the poor and the sick.

Catherine began serving those in need in hospitals and homes, which inspired followers to assist in these important missions of service, love and mercy. Furthermore, she continued to comment on public matters, petitioning for peace in the midst of political

fracture and strife. This continued through the Great Schism, beginning in 1378, as Catherine spent two years — the last years of her life — in Rome, praying and pleading for unity in the Church, and for the cause of Pope Urban VI.

By January 1380, Catherine was gravely ill, unable to eat or drink — shortly thereafter, she lost the use of her legs. At only 33 years old, she would pass away on April 29, 1380. She was canonized nearly a century later, in 1461.

Despite her short life, St. Catherine of Siena made a profound impact on the Church through her spiritually direct writings, her work serving those in need, and in preserving the unity of the Church in the face of great societal upheavals — all while being singularly devoted to living a life for Christ. Her status led her to be declared a co-patron of Italy (alongside St. Francis of Assisi) in 1939. And in 1970, Pope Paul VI declared St. Catherine of Siena a doctor of the Church.



Sharing Love through Service: *Helping Hands Ministry*

Five years ago, while helping his wife, who was involved with Meals on Wheels, parishioner Martin “Mak” Makarewicz came to a realization.

“About a third of the recipients were in our parish and there was a lot of lonely people, either living by themselves, or who could hardly get around,” Mak says. “It just seemed like they had a need.”

For some, the need was physical — they were looking for help with yard work, minor furniture repair, or moving a box that was too heavy. And for others, it was an even more basic need — a longing for human connection and friendship.

Mak set to work, determined to find a way to meet those needs. It wasn’t long before he’d gathered a number of people from Holy Name Men who were

willing to become involved, serving our homebound parishioners, and Helping Hands was born.

“Our objective is just to meet our lonely and isolated parishioners, and try to meet their needs,” Mak says. “There are so many people whose children don’t check on them or they don’t have any relatives, so we’re here to help and we’re happy to listen, or help with minor chores.”

Those who serve as part of this ministry are put on an “on call” list and notified when there’s a need, and can volunteer if it’s a need they can fill.

“We’ve done minor household repairs, yard work, and moving things — jobs that take about an hour,” Mak says. “We can’t climb ladders, do plumbing, electrical or painting jobs, but we can refer people to various social agencies.”

Although many of the needs are of a physical nature, there are also requests for something even more basic — and many times, more important.

“There are a lot of lonely and elderly people in this world who have nobody to turn to and we want them to know we have some outstanding Christian people that are willing to come to your house, pray the Rosary, look through your scrapbook with you, talk and ease your loneliness,” Mak says.

The heart of Helping Hands is reminding parishioners that even if they’re no longer physically present at Mass, they’re still an important and loved part of our community.

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Those who serve our homebound parishioners through Helping Hands are involved in a number of ways, from yard work to other small tasks.

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— Martin “Mak” Makarewicz

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Helping Hands Ministry *continued from page 7*

“St. Francis Parish really cares about our parishioners,” Mak says. “Invite us into your home so we can show you that you still have a role in this world.”

For those who are involved, it’s a way they choose to live the Corporal Works of Mercy.

“You can feed the poor or you can comfort someone’s loneliness,” Mak says. “If you spend a little time, you know you made somebody’s day and they know that they can count on you. That’s a great reward.”

Mak encourages parishioners — including students

needing service hours — who may have a skill or talent to share to consider becoming involved with Helping Hands.

“We need new members,” Mak says. “If you have a service to offer, or a trade or hobby that you can share with a fellow parishioner, or a willingness to listen and pray with a parishioner, then you’re the right person to volunteer with Helping Hands. In a world that seems to be more and more, ‘What can you do for me?’ asking, ‘What can I do, or what can our parish do, for our parishioners?’ I know it’s better to give than to receive.”

If you would like more information, or to become involved with Helping Hands, please contact Martin “Mak” Makarewicz at 217-224-8668. If you have a need and would like assistance from Helping Hands, please contact Mak directly, or you can call the parish office at 217-222-2898.

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, 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.