

Saint Francis Solanus



DECEMBER 2019

Diving into Scripture Through Our Adult Bible Studies

If you've ever struggled with reading the Bible or wondered how stories from thousands of years ago could impact your faith today, you're not alone. Many people are daunted by the big book, filled with many hard-to-pronounce names and places — and while they know that they *should* spend more time with God's Word, it never really becomes a priority.

But what if something changed? What if you came to realize that God wants to speak to you through His Word? What if you realized that stories from 2,000 — or more! — years ago could really give you guidance on how to live your everyday life? What if, through reading Sacred Scripture, you really came to know and love Jesus?

"I can honestly say that I would not be the person that I am today without my Catholic faith or the many ways my eyes have been opened through the study of Scripture," says parishioner Brad Kendrick, who coordinates the Adult Bible Studies at St. Francis Solanus. "God's Word has the ability to come to us, to speak to us, and impact our lives exactly where we are and provide us insight for the journey that is our lives."



Our Bible studies are an opportunity for adults to grow in their faith and appreciation of Scripture.

The Adult Bible Study groups meet on Wednesdays — one at 1:00 p.m. and one at 6:30 p.m. — both in the parish center. The group utilizes the *Lectio* series produced by the Augustine Institute, available on FORMED.org, which means that any parishioner can also access the program online, in the comfort of their own home. The group is

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Diving into Scripture Through Our Adult Bible Studies

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currently finishing one series, and will begin a new one in January.

Spending time in study of God's Word gives people a chance to come to know the story of their faith and learn how to apply Scripture in their daily lives. Regardless of what stage you find yourself, in faith or in life, the Bible's wisdom is always applicable.

"It is important to study Scripture because as Christians, and specifically as Catholics, we are called to understand and live out our faith on a daily basis," Brad says. "In [Scripture] study, we can learn about our inheritance and history as a Christian people, and we can also hear God's Word proclaimed to us in ways that can provide guidance and understanding in any situation we may experience in this life."

According to Brad, there is a benefit to gathering with others to study the Scripture together and learn from the insight and experience of others.

"Only in a group setting are you given the ability to bounce ideas or ponder any number of life events with people that have similar hopes, dreams, fears and struggles," Brad says. "Many times, our lives have the opportunity to be changed from the interactions that we have with others."

Brad encourages his fellow parishioners to consider taking the opportunity to deepen their faith and learn more about the beauty and power of God's Word in Scripture. Especially for those who have never participated in a Bible study, Brad reminds that all are welcome, regardless of their knowledge or experience.

"We are all on this journey together," Brad says. "We all have varying life experiences and we are all called to develop and deepen our faith. Nobody has all the answers. We come to Bible study because we know Who does have all the answers."



Each week, parishioners gather to learn about God's Word together.

"Age or level of understanding does not matter," he adds. "What does matter, is how we apply the words of God to our daily lives. Bible study in any form can help accomplish that."

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— Brad Kendrick

If you would like more information, or to become involved with our Adult Bible Study programs, please contact Brad Kendrick at bdken11.1@gmail.com or 217-430-2593.

A Letter From Our Pastor

THE WORDS OF THE SEASON: *Joy, Wonder and Gift*

Dear Parishioners,

Have you ever noticed how many of our Christmas hymns include the theme of **joy**?

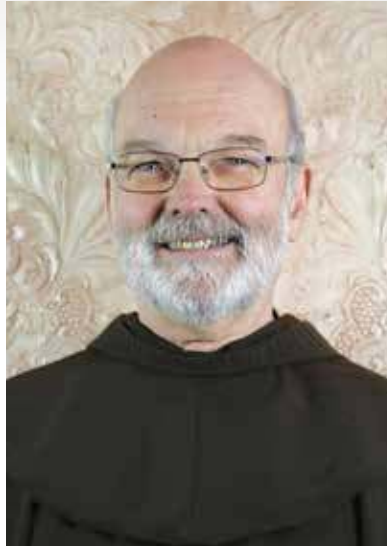
Again and again, we sing that the birth of Jesus brings us joy. The familiar songs fill our minds as we celebrate the feast. "O come, all ye faithful, *joyful* and triumphant" then on to "Good Christian men, *rejoice*" and next to "Hark! the herald angels sing...*Joyful*, all you nations, rise" and finally and above all, "*Joy* to the world! the Lord is come."

The Church's liturgy summons the whole world to join in worship, "Let the earth ring out with *joy* for you have come."

Besides joy, **wonder** is also a hallmark of Christmas.

Wonder and amazement at the news that a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem is the Christ, Emmanuel, God-is-with-us — this was a natural reaction for those who heard the shepherds' report that a band of angels had appeared to them. "All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds," St. Luke tells us (2:18). Can you imagine how much more astonishment the shepherds had experienced when they saw and heard the angels? And what must Mary and Joseph have felt when they thought about what the future would hold for themselves and this newborn baby?

We can share that same wonder when we contemplate the infant Jesus in a manger scene; when we think of how the shepherds must have reacted when their quiet night under the stars with their flocks of sheep was interrupted by a band of singing angels; what the Magi might have discussed as they followed a mysterious star from Persia west toward Jerusalem. We sing of wonder as well as of joy: "Joy to the world... *Wonders* of His



love," and we remember the wise men as they followed the "star of *wonder*." During the night, "while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of *wondering* love," for we know "How silently...the *wondrous* gift is given." God sent His Son into an humble corner of the world without great fanfare.

And that brings us to our third theme this Christmas — **gift**.

Jesus, the Son of God, the Babe of Bethlehem, is the first and greatest Christmas gift. Christianity begins with a gift: "God so loved the world that he *gave* his only Son" (Jn 3:16). Indeed, God gave us life, and we pray each and every

day for God to "*Give* us this day our daily bread." And what should our response be? Jesus Himself, the one given to us by the Father, taught, "It is more blessed to *give* than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Giving is an essential element of Christian living.

So, then, as we approach Christmas this year, let us keep these concepts, *joy*, *wonder* and *gift*, before our minds. Let us receive the *gift* of God's Son in our life with *joy* and with *wonder* at the greatness of God's love for us — and then let us pass on that love as we give from our time, our talent and our treasure to our family, our friends and our Church.

May God bless you all, and have a merry Christmas!

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



Music Ministry SUPPORTS

“He who sings, prays twice,” is a quote often attributed to St. Augustine. However, while some scholars dispute that the quote is indeed his, it cannot be denied that there is certainly something prayerful about singing — especially during Mass. The Church, in fact, encourages us to sing during the liturgy.

The Music Ministry here at St. Francis Solanus encompasses not only singing with our talented choirs, but also uses the majesty of the organ and other instruments to enrich our prayer.

Roger Begley leads the Music Ministry and is our parish organist.

“I schedule all the musicians for all the Masses and I’m in charge of keeping it all straight,” he says.

The main choir sings during the 9:30 a.m. Sunday Masses, with some of the members also singing in a contemporary group with mixed instruments at the 11 a.m. Masses.

“It is just a vital function, and a rewarding thing to do,” Roger says.

Whether the music is traditional or contemporary, the first notes played and sung during the processional tell us that what is coming is important, and that we should be prepared. That opening hymn will always be based on the readings for the day.

“As the organist, I try to not get in the way,” Roger says. “I shouldn’t distract from the Mass. The Church is also clear on this — we should be blending in. We are there to support the congregation in singing. The



Ministry

CONGREGATION IN WORSHIP

cantor is not a solo opportunity. The cantor is there to help the congregation.”

Our choir members volunteer to take part because they love to sing, and love being able to share their talents with the parish.

“People derive a great satisfaction from it,” Roger says. “You have to experience it. It’s one of those things that’s hard to talk about. They love to sing and want to share it. It’s how they express their stewardship — it’s everything, all tied in.”

Our Funeral Choir is another group of talented singers who volunteer their time to offer comfort to those grieving the loss of a loved one. There are 29 members on the roster and between 12 to 15 members are able to take part when a funeral is scheduled. Mary Lou Rakers, a Funeral Choir member, is responsible for notifying the others when they are requested.

The Funeral Choir members are willing to make time during their week because they want to offer support to the bereaved.

“They just do it,” Mary Lou says. “It’s a matter of being there for them. It’s part of our stewardship. A lot of us will know the deceased individual, or the family. This gives us the feeling we’re helping to comfort them.”

The Funeral Choir does not have regular rehearsals. If they are asked to sing a hymn not normally in their repertoire, they will try to practice it before the funeral begins.

Now that the season of Advent is here, with Christmas quickly approaching, Roger has been planning the seasonal music.

During Advent, the music is more subdued and

carries the feeling of anticipation.

“Everything is at a lower key,” Roger says.

When Christmas arrives, the tone changes dramatically.

“We roll out the ‘Gloria,’” Roger says. “We haven’t sung it during Advent, and the organ, choir and bells all go off. It’s something to look forward to.”

Christmas Eve Masses are the grandest celebrations of the year — the 4 p.m. Mass is geared toward families with children, and also is the largest Mass that evening.

The music for that early Mass will be done by a contemporary group with guitar and piano. The 10 p.m. Vigil Mass will have the traditional full choir and organ. The 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Masses will have smaller ensembles. There will be a professional trumpeter and harpist playing, as well.

“All of the hymns, songs, and responses are all geared specifically for Christmas Eve and the readings,” he says. “So I work very hard to coordinate it. I try to keep an ear to the people who like the favorite hymns and carols. But in a one-hour Mass you can’t get everything in. We do the best we can to work on the hymns and appropriate songs.”

The opening hymn is expected to be “O, Come, All Ye Faithful,” with a grand organ introduction and trumpet accompaniment.

“It’s Christmas Eve!” Roger says. “We’re celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s time to open the organ up and the choir. It’s a marvelous time to sing.”

Christmas Day Masses are set for 8 a.m. with the cantor, and at 10 a.m. with the full choir.

Anyone interested in joining the Music Ministry may call Roger Begley at 573-406-3933, or stop by the organ console to speak with him after Mass. Anyone interested in joining the Funeral Choir may call Mary Lou Rakers at 217-653-0337.

Recognizing the Season of Advent, We Can Create Faithful and Loving Traditions

As the season of Christmas approaches, it is all too easy to get swept up in the frantic commercialism that tells us that Christmas is already happening — from now up until the 25th, and not a day more. To combat this misguided understanding, and to embrace what this time of year truly means, we might consider how to enter into the sacred quiet and careful preparation of the Advent season with our families.

Starting new Advent-centered traditions within our homes is a simple way to differentiate between the two seasons and embrace the grace that comes with this season of preparation. While hanging up the stockings, consider hanging up a stocking for Jesus. Family members can place their “gifts” for Jesus there. These can be sacrifices like giving up desserts during the week or committing to doing one extra chore for another family member. Advent can be as much of a time for fasting and almsgiving as the season of Lent — after all, both seasons are preparing our hearts for a great feast of the Church.

A similar activity is to create a manger bed for Jesus. For every good deed that a family member does, have them place a little straw in a small manger in a prominent place in the house. By Christmas,

there will be a fluffy bed in which the Christ Child can be placed.

If your parish has an angel tree or participates in a gift outreach, be sure that the whole family is included in the shopping by making it a family outing, or make a card for the child together. It’s easy to see those activities as a quick good deed, but anything that helps emphasize that there is another person on the receiving end helps to make the act much more meaningful.

While there are lots of activities that can help to prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas, nothing centers us securely in this season of Advent quite like participating in the liturgy already prepared for us. As you are able, go to any penance services or live nativities, or take part in service opportunities on offer in our parish. Spend some time with your kids in the adoration chapel or in front of the Blessed Sacrament, reminding them that the Christ Who dwells there in the monstrance is the same Christ Who came to this world as a tiny baby — for it will be there in the presence of Christ that we can truly sing, with hearts ready to receive Him, “Oh come let us adore Him, oh come let us adore Him.”



The Advent Giving Tree at St. Francis Solanus

Life places us in different circumstances, and while the Christmas season can become an inward-looking time, the Advent Giving Tree helps us turn outward to consider the circumstances of others.

“Advent is a season of giving in the world and a time of preparing for Christ,” says Fr. Bob Barko. “If we can give help, let’s help. At the same time, if you’re in the position of needing help, allow others to be generous. This is a time of celebration and joy.”

About 18 years ago, the tradition of the Advent Giving Tree began at St. Francis Solanus. The giving tree offers us an opportunity to give gifts to individuals and families who might not currently be in a position to purchase them.

“When it started, it was on a very small scale, and it has really grown since then,” says Phyllis Maxwell, who has coordinated the ministry for 15 years. “We work with about 36 families now.”

During the month of November, Phyllis goes to the school and to the food pantry to ask if any families from the parish would like to participate in the program and receive gifts.

“I send each of those families a letter with a stamped envelope so that they can fill it out and send it back to me,” Phyllis says. “Letters are also sent to families who have participated in the past. Then I go through the requests and make up the ornaments.”

Preparing the ornaments takes approximately two weeks, and then around the first week of December, three Christmas trees are erected in our church, and the ornaments are hung for individuals to collect.

“Some families only request clothing, but I make sure all the children get a toy too,” Phyllis says. “Gift cards for groceries are also a popular item.”

Parishioners can collect their ornaments and then have two weeks to return the wrapped gifts to the church. Hundreds of gifts are collected each year.

“It is quite the sight to see those gifts returned to the church that weekend,” Fr. Bob says. “Remember to tape the ornaments really well on the boxes and not to put the ornament in the box!”

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St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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The Advent Giving Tree *continued from page 7*

To respect their privacy, each family is given a number, and the only individuals who know the names of the families are Phyllis, Fr. Bob and Fr. Don Blaeser. The members of the Liturgy Committee sort the gifts, and then our priests give them to the families before Christmas.

"Giving the gifts is a great privilege for me," Fr. Bob says. "We schedule an appointment with a member of the family, and we pray with them. It is an amazing time and a happy time. I like to make them laugh if I can!"

For Phyllis, coordinating the Advent Giving Tree is

something she looks forward to every year, especially during this season of helping and giving to others.

"I think our parish is one of the most generous parishes," Phyllis says. "I am very sincere about that. We couldn't ask for a better group to work with."

Thank you to all of the members of our faith community who have participated in the Advent Giving Tree tradition by either giving or receiving the generosity of others.

"I would say the Advent Giving Tree is a beautifully esoteric practice, and Phyllis sprinkles her magic on it every year," Fr. Bob says.

*If you would like more information about the Advent Giving Tree,
please reach out to 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.