

My Dear Parishioners,

Barbara Brown Taylor, the renowned author, teacher and Episcopal minister, keeps a small brass box on her dresser in front of two pictures, one of Jesus and one of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When people ask Barbara to pray for them she writes their name on a slip of paper and puts the paper in the box. Barbara writes in her book **An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith** that she has great confidence in entrusting her prayers to the Mother of Jesus:

“Mary is more like me than her son is, after all. Both of her parents were human. She was born, lived and died in the usual ways. What was unusual about her was her **reliability**. No matter what life pitched at her, Mary did not duck. She endured a difficult pregnancy to bear a singular child, whom she loved reliably through all the years of his controversial life. When her son was cut down, she was there. When it came time to prepare his body, she was there. When he was not in his tomb, she was there. As much as I hate to presume on her **reliability**, I know she will remember the people whose name I placed in the brass box, even when I forget.”

On this final Sunday of Advent the Church focuses our attention on Mary and her role in Salvation History. Sometimes it seems like Mary’s role in the Annunciation looks rather easy (as if all she had to do was simply say **yes**.) One might wonder why today’s Gospel passage of the Annunciation Story was not proclaimed on the First Sunday of Advent at the start of this season. And, since we already heard this Gospel on the Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception, why bother to repeat it again? The reason is very simple and very important. God wants us to enter the Mystery of the Incarnation being deeply united to the Blessed Mother Mary-His Mother and Our Mother. God also wants us to imitate Mary’s complete courage, faith and trust in Him.

Rev. Killian McDowell, O.S.B., in a sermon at St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota described very well the importance of Mary and her very significant role in Salvation History:

“Two things seem clear when God chooses someone for a really important role. God usually

chooses someone weak and insignificant-and God chooses that person to die. As a young girl Mary would not have been taught to read-young boys, yes but not young girls. Ancient peasant cultures counted females, including wives, among a man’s possessions. The selection of Mary’s husband would be entirely her parents’ affair. She could not refuse their choice. As a female Mary would be allowed to enter the synagogue, but had to remain in the back behind a grill. But God chooses the weak and insignificant to do God’s great work.

Mary was also chosen to die. There are many ways of dying. God called Mary to the shame of becoming an unwed mother, all of this asked of a girl of twelve or thirteen. Mary then experienced the death of being a refugee, displaced from her own home and land. As a widow she watched her Son die the painful death reserved for the scum of society. Mary had no role in Jesus’ public life. Hers was a hidden life. But Mary (as God’s secret) became one of the most influential, celebrated women in history. This secret weak unlettered Mother of God (who is our mother too) is the wisdom of God and the power of God.”

In today’s Gospel passage we hear about and celebrate the extravagant love of God who freely chose Mary to be the mother of his beloved Son. God’s choice of Mary made her **“full of grace”**. There is no point in asking what Mary did to deserve that because it was sheer gift from God. Our Gospel does not begin with what Mary does; it begins with what God does through Mary. When Mary is chosen to be the mother of God’s Son, God’s choice of her is not a reward for dedicated work or an answer to Mary’s prayer. Rather, God’s choice of Mary is the result of God’s freedom to choose Mary from among all women. When God chooses Mary, His choice makes her worthy, as His love has made her **“full of grace.”** This truth is reflected in the Magnificat, when Mary joyfully sings out:

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior because He has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid. Yes from this day forward, all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me.”

Because of God's mysterious preference, because God has freely chosen to look on Mary in such a way, and because God has made her "**full of grace**", all generations (as we today) call her blessed. For God **graced** Mary for a mission that was not merely for herself. Mary's mission in the plan of God was to give Jesus to every generation of the human family. Being chosen by God for such a mission does not exclude Mary from the human race. God's choice of her does not free her from making her choice for God. Mary put her freedom and her whole person at the service of God's plan.

Mary's entire life was a series of "annunciations." God constantly called her to be the reflection of His compassion, to be a source of persevering faith, to mirror in her motherhood of His loving providence for all His children. God asks that same **reliability** of all of us in the everyday living of our vocations. God's call to Mary mirrors His call to each one of us. In baptism God calls us (despite our own insignificance, weaknesses, and inadequacies) to "**give birth**" to God's compassion in our own homes, schools and communities. In that call, God calls us to "**die**" to our own doubts, fears, comfort and safety in order to embrace and be embraced by the new life of His Son's resurrection both in this life and the next. Like Mary, we face God's choice of us. Like Mary, we are challenged to say **yes** to His call. God has chosen every one of us and he has a role for each of us. He waits for our choice that puts our freedom at His service. If Mary, the young, unmarried pregnant teenager, can believe the incredible event that she is about to be part of, if she can trust herself and believe in her role in the great story of Salvation History, then all of us can believe in our part as well.

Mary's experience is like our own. Discerning God's will demands time and thoughtfulness. In God's "annunciations" to us, we have a great deal to process, to sort out, to make sense of. As we continue our life's journey may we seek to possess Mary's **reliable** faith and trust so that we, too, may make God's presence known in our time and place. May we be open to the presence of Gabriel "announcing" to us that the Lord is with us, that we have nothing to fear, that we have been called by God to "**give birth**" to His Son in our own time and place. So today, let the words that God spoke to

Mary become His words spoken to **us**: "Rejoice, highly favored, for I have chosen **you** to be holy and live in my presence. Yes, **you!** Rejoice." Have a Blessed week.

Love & Prayers,

Fr. John

P.S. I want to wish everyone a most **Blessed** and **Merry Christmas**. May the Christ-child give you and your loved ones the precious gifts of **peace, joy, happiness** and **love** this Christmas Season. May our beloved Jesus continue to watch over and bless you and your families throughout this coming New Year.

FLU SEASON

For health reasons, during the months of January, February and March (flu season) we will refrain from receiving Jesus' Precious Blood at Holy Communion. Thanks, Fr. John



CHRISTMAS MASSES

Christmas Eve, December 24:
Mass will be celebrated at **5PM, 8PM,**
and 11PM.

Christmas Day, December 25:
Mass will be celebrated at **9AM** and
11AM.

Please note that on **TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26th** Mass will **only** be celebrated at **9AM**. Thank you.



NEW YEAR'S MASSES

New Year's – Feast of Mary, Mother of God

NEW YEAR'S DAY, JANUARY 1, 2018

Please note that Mass will be celebrated at:
7:30 am, 9am, and 11am.

Encounter: A Retreat Experience Especially Designed for College Aged Young Adults and Recent Graduates will be held Saturday, **April 14, 2018** from 9:30 AM until 4PM at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, 310 Hertzler Road, Mechanicsburg. Easter is a perfect time to get away to refresh and renew ourselves while growing in relationship with our Lord and with other Young Adults. For more information contact your Catholic Campus Ministry/Newman Club or the Diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry at: oyyam@hbgdiocese.org or call 717-657-4804 ext. 327. WWW.HBGDIOCESE.ORG/youngchurch

2018 PARISH CALENDAR

Our 2018 Parish Calendars are available in the Narthex of the Church. I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to **Paul L. Gravenor Home for Funerals** for sponsoring this year's calendar. Thank you and God bless. Fr. John

MASS INTENTIONS

Monday, December 25, The Nativity of the Lord

9:00 ✦ Parishioners

11:00 ✦ Parishioners

**Tuesday, December 26, St. Stephen,
The first Martyr**

9:00 ✦ Phil Cardin

**Wednesday, December 27, St. John, Apostle &
Evangelist**

7:00 ✦ Stephanie Mash

9:00 ✦ Bro. Thomas Delaney

**Thursday, December 28, The Holy Innocents,
Martyrs**

7:00 ✦ Charlie & Lucy Marrone

9:00 ✦ Rick Leffler

**Friday, December 29, St. Thomas Becket, Bishop
and Martyr**

7:00 ✦ Bernie Mack

9:00 ✦ Bob & Mary Gelarden

Saturday, December 30

9:00 ✦ Louis Leone

5:00 ✦ Nina Tollis

Sunday, December 31

7:30 For the Parishioners

9:00 ✦ Donald Leffler

11:00 ✦ Poor Souls

IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

We will be publishing the names of your dear loved ones who are seriously ill or injured. After the period of one month their names will be removed. For example, names announced in the bulletin the third week of the month will be removed the third week of the following month. If at that time prayers are still needed, please feel free to contact the parish office, and we will be more than happy to re-publish your loved one's name.

December 3: Maria Mannino, Margaret Gardner, Jane Muldowney, Dakota Goshert, Brenda Crawford, Stephen Stanavage, Jennifer Ranker, Melissa Kurtz, Janet Tomko, Jean Givler, Abigail Lowe-Critchfield, Brendan Holbriiter, Michael Lillis and Richard Warner, Jim Lehmier, Tonya Stoner, Kevin Kaiser.

December 17: Julius Uribe, Jim Huber, Karen & Carol Wank

December 24: James Conway



45th MARCH FOR LIFE-

JANUARY 19

Four buses will leave from St. Leo's parish in Lancaster at **8 AM and returning at 9 PM**. Suggested bus fare is \$10 a person, and \$25 per family of 3 or more, with reduced fares and plenty of

free bus seats available. To reserve a seat call Rosie Gross at 717-397-6966.

ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Mary is full of grace—but so are you. God has filled you with his grace so that you can become “graceful” just as Mary was. She was graceful not because she had perfect etiquette or social skills. Mary was graceful because of the way God’s grace molded and formed her. Scripture tells us God has given us an “abundance” of his grace. It’s always with us, like a spring bubbling up in our hearts. There is no end to what this grace can do in our lives. Paul tells us that God’s grace is “sufficient” even to make God’s power “perfect” in our lives. This grace moves us to be unselfish, kind, and generous to everyone we meet. It helps us to forgive other people and to let go of our hurts. Most of all, the grace of God empowers us to be more and more like him. That’s what grace did in Mary’s life, and it’s what grace can do in our lives.

SANCTUARY LAMP



You may have the Sanctuary Lamp burn for a sick or deceased loved one for a donation of \$5 to defray the cost of the candles. This week the candle burns for Ron Barranco.

BENEVOLENT SOCIETY



Can you help? Our food bank is currently in need of: instant potatoes, boxed dinners and Mac and cheese! Please place items in the FOOD BANK crate in the narthex of the church. Your continued generosity is amazing. Thank you!

HORSE RACING, FUN AND FOOD

Join the Knights of Columbus for their K of C Derby, Saturday, **January 27th**. The evening will consist of 11 exciting horse races with pari-mutuel betting, door prizes, food and beverages. Tickets are \$20 and include a chance to win \$50 in one race and a chance to win up to \$1000 in Race 11. Doors open at 6 PM and post time for the first race will be 7 PM. For tickets or further information contact Ben Hoover at 808-1115 or email at hooverben4@gmail.com.

BULLETIN TRANSMISSION SCHEDULE

The bulletin must be transmitted to the printer on December 28 for the January 7 bulletin.

Selection of your child’s school is among the most important choices you will make. OMPH School partners with parents in providing a faith-based education for the children of our parish. We have a strong tradition of academic excellence, but more importantly, the gospel message and spirit of Catholicism permeate the school day. Our children are blessed to have daily interaction with the Redemptorist Fathers serving our parish.

Registration is now open to all parish families for Preschool through Grade 8 for the 2018-2019 school year. The Preschool program, for children who are 3 and 4 years old by September 1st, provides developmentally appropriate activities in a Catholic environment and offers a Munch Bunch school lunch program. Our full day Kindergarten program, for children who are 5 years old by September 1st, provides daily Religion class along with skill development in Language Arts and Math and special classes in computer, library, physical education, art, and music. Students in grades 1 through 8 experience an education noted for academic excellence in an environment which reinforces our Catholic identity. An on-site after school program is available for all students in Preschool through 8th grade. Interested parish families are encouraged to register by February 1st; registration will then open to non-parishioners.

Please join us on Sunday, January 28th as we celebrate the gift of Catholic education in our parish at the 9 AM Mass. Following the liturgy, there will be an Open House and the opportunity to meet the faculty and visit the school. You can also schedule a personal tour of the school for any day, at your convenience, by contacting the Development Office.

To learn more about our school, please visit our website at www.omph.org or call the school office at 738-2414 for further information. Find us on Facebook at OMPH-Ephrata! Financial aid is available to qualifying families.

RESPECT LIFE

Approach with me the crib of the Child God. Imagine the Baby Jesus, the King, so full of majesty, at a certain moment He opens His eyes to us. We notice right away that His most pure, highly intelligent and penetrating gaze meets ours. He immediately sees the deepest of our faults, but also the best of our qualities. At that moment, He gently touches our soul just as He moved Saint Peter during His

Passion.

It is only natural that this gaze would provoke in us a deep sorrow for our faults. Giving us a knowledge of our failings, it inspires us with a horror for our sins. But all is not lost! Just when we fear we cannot withstand that gaze, the newborn Redeemer also manifests His love of our qualities. He knows our potential for greatness and that is what He loves. And when we least expect it, by a kind entreaty of Our Lady, He smiles. Despite all His majesty, with that smile we feel the distance disappear, forgiveness invades our soul, and we determine that we will never leave the Child God's side. The Divine Child affectionately embraces us and pronounces our name, in the most clear and loving tones to ever fall upon our ears.

By Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira from Tradition, Family and Property, tfp.org Andrea Ostrowski

**LANCASTER CATHOLIC NEWS
LANCASTER CATHOLIC ACTIVITIES FAIR**
Lancaster Catholic will be hosting an Activities Fair on **Saturday, January 27th from 1-3 PM**. All aspects of Lancaster Catholic's culture will be highlighted, from the Fine and Performing Arts department to the vast options of clubs including Mini-Thon and Respect Life to Athletics and Campus Ministry.

ONE LUCKY FAMILY

One lucky family that is looking to join the Lancaster Catholic community for the 2018-2019 school year, by attending the Activities Fair, will be awarded one year's paid tuition upon completion of their application. For more information about the day or the admissions process, please contact Kyla Hockey at khockley@lchsyes.org.

ROSARY IN HONOR OF THE FAMILY

The Knights of Columbus are inviting all members of OMPH to participate in the organization's 5th Sunday Rosary Program. This service will be conducted after the **11 am mass on December 31st**. The Rosary will be dedicated to the families of OMPH parish.

The Knights of Columbus was founded in 1882, by the Venerable Father Michael McGivney, a priest at St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Conn. With

charity as its first principle, the organization has grown to 1.88 million members worldwide. Last year, the Knights donated more than 173 million and more than 71.5 million hours of service to charitable causes.



Religious Education Corner:

**Our Religious Education Class Schedule
For The Next Three Weeks Is As Follows:**

Merry Christmas!

Sunday, December 24th – NO RE Classes

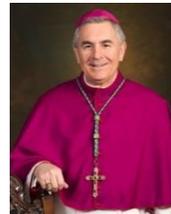
Happy New Year 2018!

Sunday, December 31st – NO RE Classes

Sunday, January 7th – RE Classes Resume

ANNUAL SANCTITY OF LIFE MASS

January 22, 2018



The Lancaster Region of the Order of Malta extends an invitation for you participation in this special Liturgy. A free will offering will benefit



“A Women’s Concern.”

Host Bishop & Concelebrant is Most Rev. Ronald Gainer, Diocese of Harrisburg, and the Celebrant and Homilist will be the Most Rev. William E. Lori, S.T.D. Archdiocese of Baltimore.

St. Joseph’s Church on Cabbage Hill in Lancaster will be our location again this year with **Mass starting at 7 PM**. We will be providing offsite parking with shuttle bus service to and from St. Joseph’s for you convenience. **Contact Gerry Ganse 717-577-2735 for shuttle information.**

BENEVOLENT SOCIETY



At this time of year, the Benevolent Society would like to say thank you for the support of

our food bank. The crate in the narthex is ALWAYS full each and every Sunday with your nonperishable donations. When we ask for a specific item in the bulletin, we KNOW that shelf will be filled after the next week's masses!! Our parishioners always come through with physical donations as well as donations to the poor box in the back of the church. Every single coin that is placed in the poor box goes to help people in our community! We have a few weekly donors who have made the food bank a priority for many years and we are so very grateful! This past year we had many other donors or organizations who donated or held food drives for us: 4 Seasons Produce, Dairy Queen, The Knights of Columbus and the Ladies Auxiliary, Cocalico Class of '67 reunion, Peters Porches, Dot to Dot ministries, Boy Scout Troops 73, 115, & 363, Al's Service Center, and the OMPH School and Religious Education students. The CROP Walk and Matthew 25 also raised funds for us. We are also thankful for the local grocery stores who do regular weekly donations: Weisers, Redners, Weis, and Target. Last and CERTAINLY not least: this year our list of volunteers has AGAIN increased dramatically to over **92 regular volunteers!** We truly appreciate the efforts of each and every one. There are so many other donors to individually mention but please know that we are humbled by your continued generosity!