



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE PROJECT

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Right Relationship

Dan Driscoll

We were created for the purpose of glorifying God by living in right relationship as Jesus Christ did, by becoming holy through the power of the Spirit of God, by existing as persons in communion with God and every other creature.

Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*

During the first octave of Easter, the Liturgy of the Hours is explicit in its demonstration that praise is the foundation of community. Praise underlies everything that exists; it is the song of creation itself. The liturgy of the hours reveals the church's wisdom by repeating the Sunday psalms and canticles daily, as if Sunday itself were relived eight times. Easter Sunday extends itself and stretches itself, groaning with promise, creativity, and new life, not abandoning us but remaining to celebrate God's miraculous love poured out, God's transformational love that is stronger than death. Morning prayer during the octave includes the Canticle of Daniel. This canticle, a litany of praise, is particularly significant during this octave because the creatures that exist in praise of God are from every possible created order, from animals and plants to inanimate objects and natural forces. The very dew praises God, the light and darkness praise God. Indeed, all creation claps and sings to God's delight. We pray this canticle repeatedly during the octave to experience the cosmos, rejoicing in the Resurrection.

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, Praise and exult God above all forever. ...

*Fire and heat, bless the Lord.
Cold and chill, bless the Lord. ...
Mountains and hills, bless the Lord.*

Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord. ...

All you birds of the air, bless the Lord.

All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord. ...

This prayer echoes the understanding that the true vocation of the creature is to praise God. Birds, mountain lions, and fish praise God - live their vocation - by being fully what they were created to be: the fullness and completion and perfection itself of "bird," "mountain lion," and "fish." The very mountains and plains and seas that house the creatures also live in praise of God by being the fullness of what they were created to be.

And of course, humans live their vocation by being the fullness of what it means to be human.

...O Israel, bless the Lord.

Praise and exult God above all forever. ...

The praise of God exists even before the actual practice of worship begins. We live in praise of God when we live as fully human persons, created in the image and likeness of God. A tall order, we might think, to live fully the image and likeness of God. Yet this is the ground of our existence in community.

I work in a Montessori elementary school with a distinct mission to live with the poor. This praise of God serves as the foundation. We seek to bring the poor and the non poor together in a significant way so that the children will spend their childhoods working together, playing together, thinking, praying, and exploring together. Our children attend two farms weekly so the classroom itself does not limit the exploration of creation. Our faculty begins weekly staff meetings by reading aloud our mission statement, followed by a list of belief statements. The list of beliefs begins with "We believe that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God," includes, among others, "We believe that diversity is God's creative tapestry," and ends with "We believe the ultimate aim of a Montessori education is to foster world peace and work toward global justice." We recognize that the final belief statement is directly related to the first. The fact that we are created in God's



image and likeness forms our community, establishes our connection to the world around us, and challenges us to live a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, leading us to world peace and global justice.

Indeed, God is Triune, so we are created in the image and likeness of God who is eternally in relationship, God who cannot NOT be in relationship, God who is Relationship itself. When we live as we were created to live, in God's own image and likeness, then we live as Jesus Christ did, in right relationship with God and every creature. We read his story and we see what it might mean to be in right relationship. It might mean entering the homes of those rejected by others, embracing the sick, welcoming the sinner, forgiving and comforting and feeding and healing. It means walking among the rejected, the poor, the outcast. It means refusing to allow one's past to define oneself, instead to see today as the beginning of a brand new relationship, a new life, a resurrection of sorts. It means staring evil in the face, girded by God, and not running away. It means living with compassion. It means going off alone to be with God, and also being surrounded by thousands who seek to hear the Good News. Living in right relationship means creating the kind of community where each is challenged,

loved, and nurtured, a community that will not allow anyone to be left behind, allow anyone to be a scapegoat, or allow anyone to be forgotten. It is a community of honesty and trust, a willingness to sacrifice for each other and to seek justice. It is a community that makes it easier to be good, a community that makes living our vocation to praise a delight. It is a community that does not give up.

The Easter experience, and praying the octave with the Easter psalms and canticles, offers a taste of what we can truly be, together. Here we encounter a love so powerful that it doesn't leave anyone behind; the lame will walk, the sick will be healed, the blind will see, the poor will hear the good news, the sorrowing will be comforted, and even the dead will rise.

...Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord. Spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord.

Holy ones of humble heart, bless the Lord... Praise and exult God above all forever...



Dan is the head of school at Good Shepherd, a Montessori elementary and adolescent program in South Bend, IN.

On Creation

Allison Covey

I recently attended a 'green living' show at my local convention center. As I walked the aisles, filled with home solar panels, water filtration systems and even hybrid Porches, it was clear that concern for our environment, for God's Creation, has definitely reached the mainstream. No longer is saving the Earth and its creatures the sole purview of free spirited hippies or idealistic university students. Terms like "sustainable," "organic" and "carbon footprint" have become commonplace in classrooms and boardrooms alike.

Sixteen years before the film *An Inconvenient Truth* sparked debate about global warming, twelve years before *Fast Food Nation* challenged the American diet, fifteen years before Pope Benedict XVI was nicknamed "The Green Pope," Pope John Paul II published a message in honor of the World Day of Peace entitled *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*. It was December of 1989, the hole in the ozone layer was a new and growing concern and the Exxon Valdez disaster was still fresh in the public mind. In a Church so often characterized in the media as behind the times, John Paul II's message is still truly visionary. Two decades later,

with ocean ecosystem collapse predicted in the next 50 years and *Deepwater Horizon* still in the news, his words are even more relevant as we continue to unravel and respond to the complexities of our environmental challenges.

Ecology may seem like an odd topic to cover on the World Day of Peace but John Paul II saw strong connections between environmental abuse, peace and social justice. *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation* looks at ecology holistically, an approach theologians and scientists alike are still only beginning to explore. As always, his view is grounded in Scripture, God's creation of the Earth. In Genesis, God proclaims the goodness of His Creation several times and, only after He has entrusted it to Adam and Eve, does He rest. Our first parents, of course, were disobedient to God and, as a result, the earth rebelled against them, setting human and animal, human and environment against each other. Not only did humanity suffer as a result of the Fall but the rest of Creation also shares in our punishment. All life on Earth is "subjected to the bondage of sin and decay," awaiting freedom, with us, in

Christ Who reconciles all things to Himself and makes Creation new (4).

Along the way, we seem to have forgotten one of Adam and Eve's hardest lessons, that when humanity is not at peace with God, we are not at peace with His Creation. John Paul II reminds us again as he places the ecological crisis within the context of a broader moral crisis (5). When we put economics, industry and technology ahead of the rights and dignity our fellow people and ahead of our duty to care for the Earth that God has entrusted to us, we find, as Adam and Eve did, that our environment is no longer a bountiful paradise. Hosea's prophetic warning is as fitting today as ever. *Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing* (5).

Pope John Paul II warns us that we must always remain aware of the broad reaching effects of our interference in the ecosystem; not all scientific and technological advances are to be embraced (6). Environmental degradation through pollution, abuse of natural resources and unjust allocation of land endangers not only vulnerable animal and plant populations but the world's human poor as well. He pinpoints *lack of respect for life* as the underlying problem behind this economically-driven destruction. The dignity of the

human person must come first. When we look closely, we find that greed, inequality and other forms of social injustice are at the heart of many of the Earth's most pressing ecological concerns.

The Pope characterizes the ecological crisis as a distinctly moral issue linked directly to the dignity of the human person and *the search for peace within society* (15-16). He insists that *the right to a safe environment* be included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, holding industrialized and developing nations alike to high standards of ecological accountability (9-10). John Paul II recognizes, however, that we cannot achieve the changes the Earth needs without international cooperation built on peaceful relations between governments, individuals and faith communities. Within the environmental crisis, he sees an opportunity for greater unity and restored order.

When we value the human person and the integrity of God's Creation above wealth and power, it's not only our social problems that begin to disappear. John Paul II calls each of us to take a look at our own lifestyles and ask what we are putting first. We are all aware of the importance of voting with our consciences at the polls but how about at the cash register? Each time we reach for our wallets, we are sending a message to corporations and governments around the world about our values. Are we willing to pay a little more for a fair trade or cruelty-free product? Do we avoid giving our business to companies with questionable ethics? Have we made *simplicity, moderation and discipline* and a *spirit of self sacrifice* a part of our day to day lives (13)? John Paul II leaves us with the example of St. Francis, friend to the poor and to all of Creation, to inspire us as we continue to work toward the harmony that God intended us to enjoy with one another and with His Creation. 

Allison is a PhD candidate in the field of Systematic Theology. She works as a Pastoral Associate and holds a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (Religious Education) and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (Sacred Scripture) from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas.



Ruined for Life: The Vision of Nativity House

Venus Wozniak

That is why it is dangerous to enter into a relationship with the Lazaruses of our world. If we do, we risk our lives being changed

-Jean Vanier

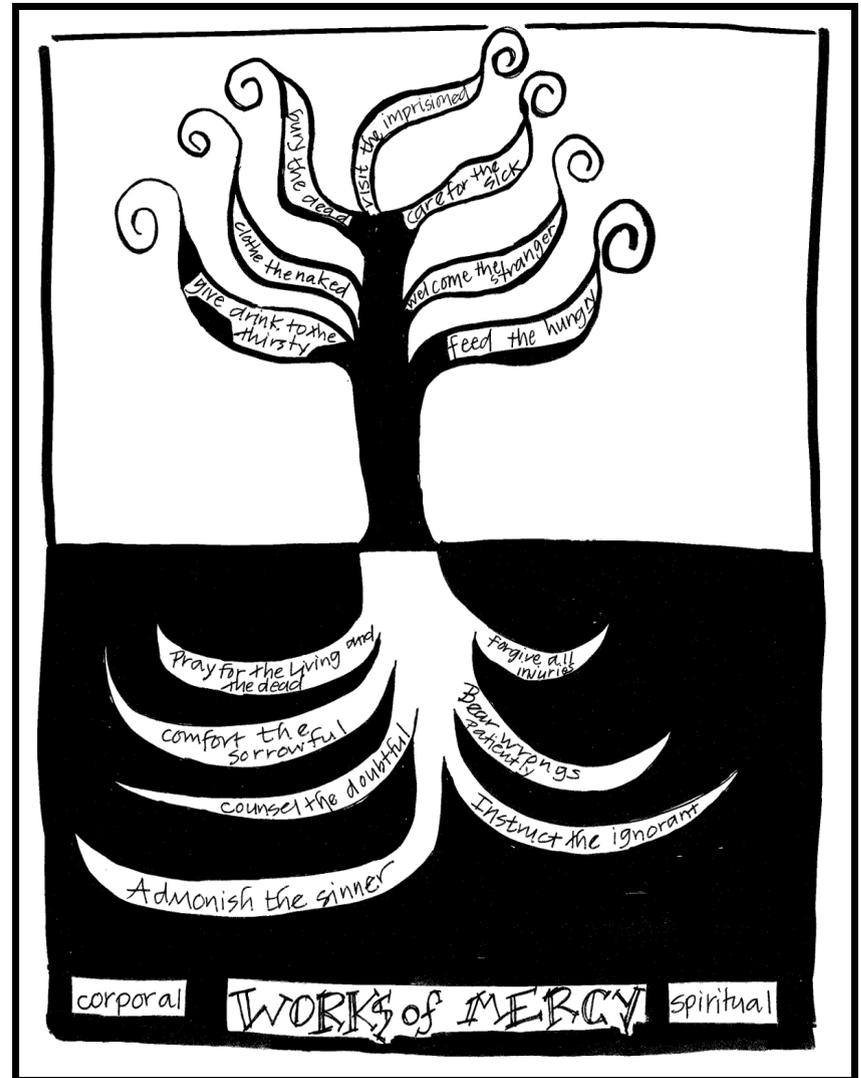
It was the summer of 2000. A hundred or so young adults - some newly graduated from college, others had been out in the real world for a while and were looking for more, all of us pretty sure we needed to do something meaningful with our lives - came together at a retreat center in Aptos, California for the Jesuit Volunteer Corp (JVC): Southwest Region Orientation. For those first 10 days of our one year commitment we were awakened to what it meant to live a life rooted in social justice, simple living, community, and spirituality. After orientation, we divided up and headed to our respective cities to begin our year of service. Fourteen of us in four cars headed to Sacramento.

Justin and I met that summer after college through our volunteer year in Sacramento, California; Justin was in Casa Ignatius and I was in Casa Jane Addams. He was working at Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker in the soup kitchen, feeding between 500-1000 people a day. I was working at the Sacramento Food Bank in their Women's Wisdom Project - an arts therapy program for women in need. The lessons from the year are innumerable. The most profound lesson was the undeniable fact - each human person has one thing in common - indelible dignity. The JVC

tag line is *Ruined for Life*. They tried to explain it. At the time I didn't quite get it. But it is true; living a life that is rooted in the Works of Mercy (Matthew 25: 31-46) social justice, simple living, community, and service is transformative.

Fast forward to January of 2010. Justin, Gracie (our daughter - two and a half at the time) and I had been living in the western suburbs of Chicago for almost a year. We had been told that DuPage County was among the wealthiest around. We were feeling out of touch with the needs of the poor in our area. We were not convinced with DuPage County's reputation of wealth. I considered visiting with the pastor of our parish and saying, *Where are the poor of our parish and how can we get involved with serving them?* I thought for sure that I would be laughed out of his office.

Since becoming family, Justin and I have had a dream of living off the land, in community with the poor. On Right to Life Sunday in January of 2010, the vision came. I had heard of Project Gabriel in passing but this particular Sunday it was spelled out for our parish and a call for volunteers was sounded. The idea of befriending a woman in need and walking with her through her pregnancy sounded like a great way to be in touch with the poor in my community. I had done similar work through a shelter in Chicago. This seemed like a perfect opportunity. The wheels kept turning and the Spirit



kept nudging.

Through prayer and conversations with people working closely with expectant mothers waiting through unplanned pregnancies, the need for Nativity House became apparent. A first time mother waiting through an unexpected pregnancy struggles through many uncertainties. Motherhood comes with enough difficulties - add poverty issues, homelessness, domestic violence - parenting becomes secondary. Survival is first and foremost. Our prayers helped us realize the need and the call.

With the publication of the first *Visitation* we kicked off the mission and vision of Nativity House. This newspaper not only helps us get the word out about Nativity House but also encourages others to get involved and discuss social issues in a spiritual context. With the circulation of the newspaper and through talking with friends the Mothering Community of Nativity House is budding. Our community is a group of people who are committed to supporting the dignity of life through the Works of Mercy.

In the pages of this Nativity House insert we have included articles by some of our community members. They speak to the work that we aim to

do. At our most recent community meeting we were tackling the simplification of our mission and vision statements. Through our brainstorming the members of the community whittled it down to 3 words - hospitality, community, sustainability.

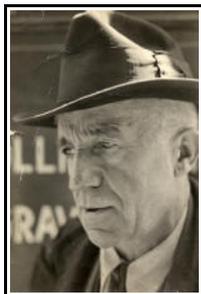
Nativity House will offer hospitality to expectant mothers in need. We will be a Mothering Community - a house of guest mothers, a family (Justin, Gracie and myself), and volunteers living in community; a larger community of volunteers who will offer their expertise in mothering, birthing, etc.; a farming community dedicated to connection to the earth and promoting the dignity of work. Nativity House will not only teach and offer sustainably farmed produce to the community, but it will also offer the attributes of a vibrant Mothering Community as sustenance for anyone who wishes to participate.

There is no doubt that our life experience has shaped this vision. Along the way we have been given glimpses of what is possible - living off the land, serving others, living in community. The seeds of the vision were planted almost 11 years ago. Finally the vision is sprouted and the Nativity House community is a reality.

Easy Essay:

Share Your Wealth

Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



1. God wants us to be our brother's keeper.
2. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to instruct the ignorant, at a personal sacrifice, is what God wants us to do.
3. What we give to the poor for Christ's sake

is what we carry with us when we die.

4. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau says:
"When man dies he carries in his clutched hands only that which he has given away."

Nativity House Update

Justin Wozniak



Planning for Nativity House has been a great experience overall. The best thing about it is bringing our planning process together and we've had a resounding response from many people- we've received pledges of support and helpful advice from educators, social workers, business experts, writers, P.R. types, and even a doula. As we move closer to implementing the project, we need additional support and feedback from the community on what resources are available and how to get things together.

Fund-raising: In this issue, we are directly asking your support for the

first time. We're doing this because our planning process has reached a point where this is the right thing to do. However, we are additionally interested in creative funding sources and opportunities that you may be aware of. Please send us notes and forward web sites that can help us find the resources to bring things together quickly.

Farm connections: Venus and I have some farm experience (we were teachers at a farm-based Montessori program) but we need to get connected to the small suburban farm scene (yes, we think there is one). We also need to identify a cash crop/product on the roughly 5 acres that we are hoping to get for the project. This will go a long way toward supporting the project, taking a load off of fund-raising and making Nativity House a truly sustainable model. We have some ideas but would love to hear yours.

Anti-poverty programs: The primary purpose of Nativity House is to serve pregnant, single women in need of housing, and we have a qualified team in place to oversee this program. However, we need to get connected to the greater anti-poverty network, share information about our project and learn from other models. Hopefully, many of you have projects in mind that you can tell us about. (Don't worry if you think we've heard of it,

we'd still be interested in gathering your opinions!)

Green technologies: It might be hard to see how Nativity House can focus on sustainable technologies and ecological awareness, because of our primary focus on quickly constructing a dignified shelter. However, one of our collaborators has convinced us that this is a strength for many reasons. Those of you interested in this kind of thing should get in touch with us now, while things are still in the early stages.

Outreach: This is our third issue of *The Visitation*. We would love some feedback. How are we doing? Let us know. We are also always seeking out new contributors to *The Visitation* and would like to find out about new places to send it. If you have a theological reflection, social justice reflection, or artwork that you would like to contribute please contact us. Additionally, if you know what "Web 2.0" means, please send us an e-mail.

Business status notes: We have registered as a non-profit corporation in the state of Illinois as "Nativity House of Illinois" and have filed federal paperwork as well. What this means is that your donations to Nativity House have a strong basis for sound financial management and will likely qualify as tax-deductible. For more information, contact us at any time.



In spite of the nuclear age we are living in, we can plant our gardens even if they are only window boxes. We can awaken ourselves to God's good earth and in little ways start going out on pilgrimage, to the suburbs, to the country, and when we get the grace, we may so put off the old man, and put on Christ, that we will begin to do without all that the City of Man offers us, and build up the farming commune, the Village, the City of God wherein justice dwelleth.

From "Distributism Is Not Dead"
by Dorothy Day (1897-1980)
The Catholic Worker,
July-August 1956.

Subscriptions

Are you wondering how you ended up on our mailing list?

The Visitation has distributed 600 issues per printing to friends, family, colleagues, and organizations. With this double issue we are increasing the job to 1000 issues to ensure that they can be made available widely.

So far, we have been operating with a very informal mailing list. However, we would like to begin firming up a subscription list to those of you interested in continuing to receive our newspaper.

Please send us an email to confirm that you would like to stay on our mailing list in the future. Additionally, feel free to suggest persons or organizations you think would be interested in receiving the paper.

When you do, please consider a donation to cover the printing and shipping costs.

Thank you!

subscriptions@nativity-house.org

Ora et Labora

God doesn't always give us explicit answers to some of our deepest questions. I talk, Jesus listens. I'm sure many can understand this experience with prayer. Even worse, my deepest questions like, *Why am I here? Why do we suffer? or What does it mean to be human?* often result in pious answers or explanations that ring a bit hollow in a modern world gone mad. This isn't new either; Job experienced the same pious answers in his time.

However, Christ does give us clues as to his purpose for us. We do have a road map that brothers and sisters who have walked the Christian path before us have developed. The ancient monastic tradition of *Ora et Labora* (for those of you who don't speak Latin, myself included, *Ora et Labora* means Work and Prayer) implies that we have a two-fold purpose. First, to participate in physical labor is to give special consideration to the body. Second, we're not just beasts of burden, but human beings that are

Nick McCann

capable of reasoning and improving productivity of our enterprises. Monks have not only modeled physical work, but critical thinking to us. They were the first to drain swamps in Europe and turn them into productive farmland. These were feats that were thought impossible. In Iowa, where I live and work, early settlers took a page out of that book and drained a large chunk of the state to expose some of the most productive farmland the world has ever seen.

In recognizing both our physical and spiritual nature, it is not surprising that agriculture has been an important part of the Christian tradition, especially the monastic tradition. Agriculture allows us the opportunity to use our bodies and our minds to cooperate with God in creation. The Catholic Worker movement has always prioritized connecting both rural and urban areas through farms and through this has helped to connect people with creation.

Through agriculture, I find that my understanding of that tradition of *Ora et Labora* is not an archaic relic of the past, but something that is necessary to our salvation. Physical work is not something to be avoided, but something that is necessary as I work out my own salvation. The joy that I feel as I use my mental abilities to improve the productivity of agricultural enterprises is not a guilty pleasure, but an expression of my life's purpose. Through agriculture, I find that, at least for myself, I can begin to answer the question, *What does it mean to be human?* After all, if God doesn't make mistakes and we were given hands and heads, then using them both brings us closer to being fully human. When we are fully human, our work and our thoughts combine to create our own life's prayer to our Creator. It seems to me that God would like that, but then again, I talk, Jesus listens. 

Nick is an agricultural specialist that works for a small non-profit in Iowa. He is a member of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Ames, IA.

On the Dignity of Women

Sue Stroka

Today, woman is _____. How shall we answer?

Being a woman myself, conditioned by past experience as each of us are, I had my own basic positive image of woman. However, I recently had the great joy of deepening and enriching this understanding through a small group study of some documents on women written by Pope John Paul II. The study was part of ENDOW, Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women, which brings women together to explore their role in humanizing and transforming society.

Soon after beginning the study, it clearly struck me that if all women, and men, from their youth, truly knew the dignity and worth of a woman and deeply lived out of that knowledge, there would be no abortions, no need for crisis pregnancy centers, no need for Nativity House. Obviously idealistic, but the proclamation of the kingdom pretty much drives us in that direction.

In the last few years, I have had close contact with many young women who were trying to deal with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy. In too many cases, these women had little sense of their own dignity and worth. Often the men in their lives also utterly failed to demonstrate that manly respect for her dignity, resulting in difficult realities

for all involved and the challenge of dealing with those realities. Through the study of *Mulieris Dignitatem* (*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*), one of John Paul II's encyclicals, we are given a fuller appreciation of woman and her God-given role as an individual person and in relationship with others.

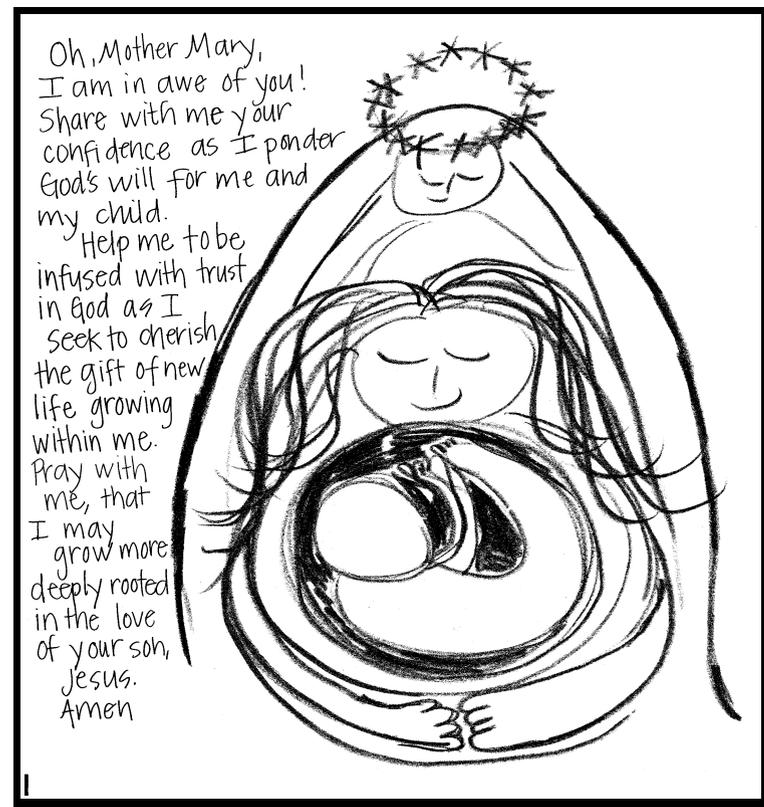
Her dignity is bestowed by the Creator and cannot be taken away, even though many do not see it, or recognize it or honor it. In the beginning, in the second creation story of Genesis, we see that woman is created out of the side of man as a sign of *her essential identity with regard to man* (John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*). God said *It is not good that man should be alone* (Gen 2:18). He is fulfilled in relationship with her. Her origin is one of unity with man, both created in the image and likeness of God, both called *to share in the intimate life of God himself*. (MD, 4) The *unity of the two* (*Gaudium et Spes*) is based on the fundamental equality of the man and woman, but that unity is broken through sin, and the struggles of men and women ensued. Man *cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self* (GS) which is demanded of both men and women. The woman was created with a particular richness and gift which is her femininity. She chooses to serve the person who is other than herself. She has a particular

gift of receptivity. When woman says yes to her Creator, she is the bearer of life, physical and/or spiritual. She ultimately brings us salvation, through the Virgin Mary's fiat, and the birth of our Redeemer.

Because He is risen, we are free to respond within the kingdom which is at hand. We live out our femininity in numerous ways. We women are free to make a gift of ourselves in radical love with our spouse in marriage. In virginity we are spiritual mothers to other souls. Edith Stein puts it so beautifully:

The soul of a woman must therefore be expansive and open to all human beings; it must be quiet so that no small weak flame will be extinguished by stormy winds; warm so as not to benumb fragile buds; clear, so that no vermin will settle in dark corners and recesses; self-contained, so that no invasions from without can imperil the inner life; empty of itself, in order that extraneous life may have room in it; finally, mistress of itself and also its body, so that the entire person is readily at the disposal of every call.

Continued on page 6...



The Dignity of Birth

Felicia Leon-Driscoll

It's Spring, and life in the northern hemisphere is bursting forth in bud, in sprout, in birdsong. A walk through the neighborhood attests to the miracle of the urgency of the life force. We are assaulted by the damp perfume of the hyacinth, the sudden downpour of a Spring shower, the outbursts of color in the yellow forsythia and purple tulip. Every living thing appears to be giving birth!

For the past 15 Springs, I cannot go on a walk without being reminded of my first birth, the life force bursting forth through me. My husband was in graduate school, and I was working at the homeless center. It was a Sunday, and I was awakened by cramps much more insistent than the Braxton-Hicks I had been experiencing for weeks. We went to Mass at our parish, walked the lakes at Notre Dame, then I went in to work, to tie up a few loose ends before my maternity leave.

Looking back, I marvel at how calm we were; we had been well-prepared by our Bradley childbirth instructor to know that this was a pinnacle human experience, not a medical pathology. We felt it would be best to stay home as long as possible to keep from pacing the halls at the hospital, to keep from having too many opportunities for the helping professionals to offer us their wares to speed up labor, to *take the edge off* the pain.

The baby came just after midnight. There was an overwhelming sense of joy, accomplishment, well-being. We have a photo of me beaming, holding my prize all swaddled and red.

My husband and I became insufferable at dinner parties; we had become the poster couple for natural childbirth. Perfectly appropriate guests just weeks before, we were now "experts," and would spout off about mucus plugs

and intact perineum and other things better left unsaid...at least at dinner parties.

We got so good at birthing, that I trained for them like a birthing marathon, eating just right, doing prenatal yoga, jogging, meditating, visualizing. We had another baby 14 months later, than another 16 months later, then a fourth 14 months after that. With four children 3 and under, I would attract comments in the grocery store: "are they all yours? Which ones are twins? 3 and under? How is that even mathematically possible?" The next thing we birthed was a Montessori school, but that is another story.

When I thought perhaps I was experiencing the early menopause of my mother and aunts at age 42, I found out I was experiencing pregnancy #5. Having birthed our fourth child at home, we planned for another homebirth. How exquisitely disappointing was it to discover that this pregnancy was a complete *placenta previa*, that there was no way

to get the baby out safely without a c-section! The natural childbirth queen would need to step down from her throne!

I mourned the loss of the natural labor and childbirth, *my* control and *my* plans. Some of my "crunchy granola" friends completely understood, others said "what's the big deal?!" My lesson in the dignity of birth came from my friend, the Bradley instructor who had witnessed all kinds of births since witnessing the birth of my first child, her first birth 15 years ago: "natural birth, medicated birth, *every* birth is a miracle." 

Felicia Leon-Driscoll is a mother of 5 children who, after facilitating the JustFaith program in her parish for several years, was inspired to found Good Shepherd Montessori School with her husband, Dan Driscoll, in South Bend, IN.

Briefly, The Spirit Entered- Suddenly, Justice was Born

Adam Setmeyer

“What is spirituality?” A graduate class full of seminarians and lay ministry students were asked by their professor. Our class was determined conjure up a definition thick with meaning, and one by one in came rolling the ornate definitions. The professor replied, simply, to each, “Good.” Then, when we were done, he asked his second question, “What is missing from all of these definitions?” A pregnant pause; confused looks surfacing. “The Holy Spirit.” Not a single person had mentioned, in defining spirituality, the Holy Spirit.

I’d like to ask another simple question, *what is social justice?* Or, slightly nuanced, *what is Christian about social justice?*

“We are going shopping to help save the world!” yelled Oprah. I still remember hearing these words on a local newscast in her seemingly trademarked tone which can excite the masses about anything from a new style of shoes to the most recent selection in her book club to, yes, social justice. Well intentioned as Oprah is about the now widely recognized (RED) campaign I believe she also has misunderstood justice. Of course, for some time now, one could get involved in charitable work (the work of love) in organizations with no institutional relationship to the Church (from the Girl Scouts to the Rotary Club, etc.) That’s nothing new. Groups affecting social change exist widely as well, such as Amnesty International. Nothing at all is wrong with this reality, to the contrary these activities spring from the well of good will endowed in each of us. But, it seems to me, the institutionalization of charity and justice outside of religious bodies is a new happening. The impact of this is that charity and justice, in and of themselves, are no longer distinguishing

characteristics of the Christian faith. Justice, like faith, has become one of life’s many choices: a club to join, a product to purchase, or a brand to promote. So, what is Christian about social justice?

June 12th the church will celebrate Pentecost and what is commonly referred to as the “birthday of the church,” but I want to offer a different understanding of Pentecost, one which I think can help us develop an answer to the question at hand (note: this is not my original argument). For the moment, I want to distinguish between the coming of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus, and the followers of Jesus coming together in order to fulfill God’s mission in our world. The church was not really born until they started integrating God’s boundary breaking missionary call to serve the world into their identity and being. Or, put more directly, the church is *missionary by its very nature.*

Acts, sometimes called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit, tells us the story of the original followers coming to realize this and fulfill this vision. Every time the Spirit enters their presence the Apostles and believers take a step towards being truly church. At the Jewish celebration of Pentecost those present encountered the Holy Spirit as a mighty rushing wind which filled the room and rested on them like a fire aflame. The gift of the Spirit was given to the St. Peter and others present, but this was not a onetime occurrence. From this point forward the Spirit guides the people of God and, more and more, they actively listen and follow.

Let me point out two other brief entrances of the Spirit key to the coming church. First, in Acts 4, the believers learn what it means to live radical

community. The Spirit fills them with power so they can meet the needs of one another by handling everything *in common.* Secondly, their journey with the Spirit climaxes in Acts chapter eleven. Here the Spirit guides Peter in a testimony by which he announces there is no longer a boundary between Jews and Gentiles. And, in Antioch, the believers are able to put Peter’s word into action: they are a group of Jews and Gentiles in common (Acts 11:20-21), and they extend their gifts to meet the needs of others outside their borders (Acts 11:29).

In Antioch the Holy Spirit once again entered. In Antioch the community listened to its boundary breaking message of mission. And, not coincidentally, in Antioch the believers were first called Christians.

Though hardly a complete definition, I believe what is Christian about social justice is the involvement and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be a people of justice by the Holy Spirit. Under the guidance Holy Spirit we are led beyond our boundaries for the sake of God’s mission. And, we encounter in those people suffering from injustices the real presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. While the world is full of people of good will, I believe Spirit compels the church’s efforts of love and social justice beyond where we are capable of going on our own. The Spirit of wisdom enlivens our

vision to see all people in all situations full of dignity and deserving of what is right. As in the Jane Kenyon poem *Briefly it Enters, Briefly Speaks,* gives us a new means to see the world. She writes:

I am the maker, the lover, and the keeper...

When the young girl who starves sits down to a table, she will sit beside me...

I am the food on the prisoner’s plate...

I am the one whose love overcomes you, already with you when you think to call my name...

As the body of Christ it is our duty then to not sit idly by and wait for a manifestation of the Spirit in fire once again, but to actively listen through the power of prayer. Prayer, then, is not a way out of the world, an escape from life’s troubles, but the Spirit uses it as a way to enter more deeply into it and to be compelled to action. 

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Continued from **On the Dignity of Women**

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said that *when a man loves a woman, he has to become worthy of her...The history of civilization could actually be written in terms of the level of its women.* Today do we women truly know and understand our own dignity as women?

There is a way to grow in that understanding. I found that ENDOW is helping me as a “woman in the pew” through church documents and the writings of saints such as Edith Stein. We all hope to grow in our

understanding and can share that understanding with others, both men and women. Living in the truth...in Him who is the way, the truth and the life, in that fullness women and men find the way to make a gift of themselves and honor their God-given dignity.

How will our thoughts, words and actions speak to who woman is today?



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The Call to Holiness: Seasons of Christ

Venus Wozniak

It was sometime in the middle of February. While it was the dead of winter and life was suspended underneath massive amounts of snow, there was a new excitement around the coming of Spring. Four moms and their children (me and mine included) gathered in my basement to plant the first seeds of the year. We planted tomatoes, zucchini, okra, beets, peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, bok choy, herbs, and that was just the seedlings that needed a head start. We have a host of other seeds that will go directly in the ground at the end of May.

As we were soaking peat pellets and planting seeds one of the moms commented how good it felt to have her hands in the dirt. Everyone else quickly agreed. Looking back at that moment, I now realize that people who acknowledge the satisfaction of connectedness to the earth are tapping into our inheritance.

Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:5-7).

Not only were we created to cultivate the earth, but we were created from the earth. It is part of our nature to yearn for connectedness to the land.

So there we were in the dead of winter, clinging to what we knew would bring life and sustenance to our families. A few days after our first seed planting adventure, we shared through email that we all had seedlings. Within a few days time we were witness to something that

seemed lifeless sprout into something that will within a few months provide organic produce teeming with goodness from the earth.

I can't help but think of my ancestors, only a generation or so back, that looked to farming as their means of living. How closely they must have attended to the turning of the seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter -- Sowing, Nurturing, Reaping, Resting and Preparing. The coming of Spring meant so much more than tulips, hyacinths and daffodils.

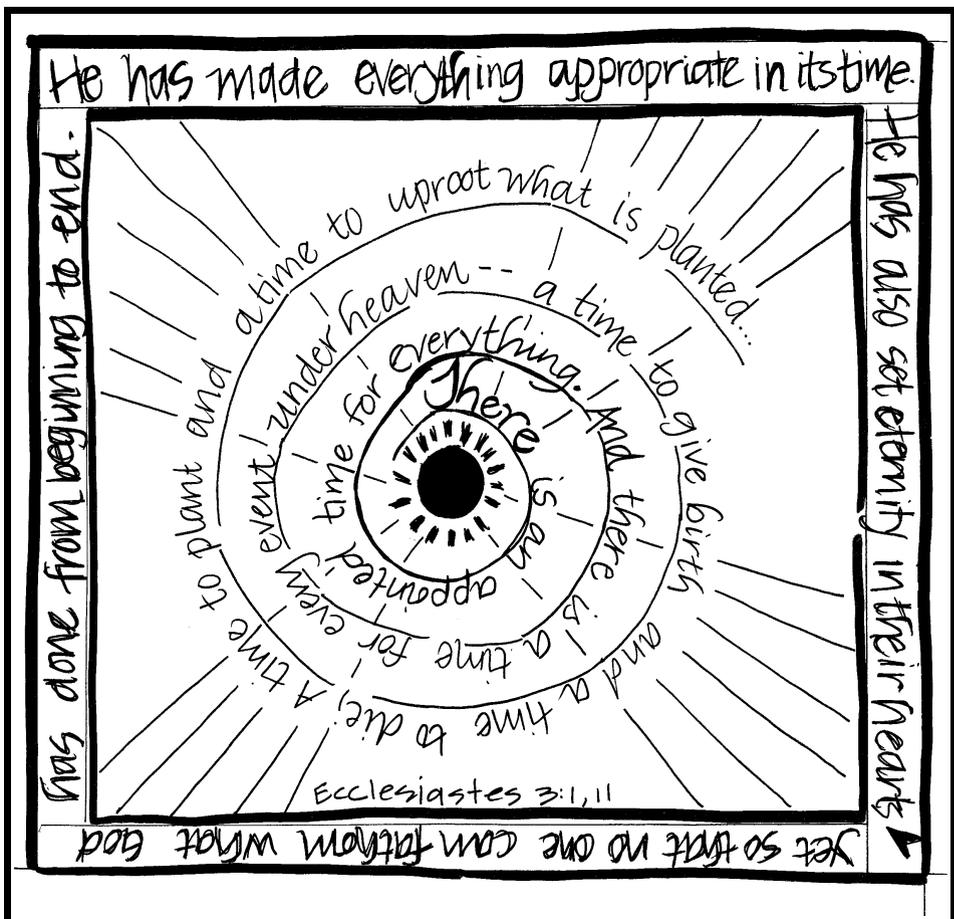
Sowing, Nurturing, Reaping, and Resting. Seasons.

Seasons dictate much for us - what we put on, our actions, even who we see and spend our time with. Awareness to the earth's seasons help us as humans to be more in touch with our humanness. What am I sowing? How am I nurturing? Is it time to reap or rest? Where in the continuum do I currently fall? With such a busy life, I am sure that various elements of life will fall in to different seasons. In my work it is the reaping season. In my relationships I am in the nurturing season, etc.

It happened this year, as it does every year, that seedling season coincided with Lent. Through out the Lenten weeks I took the time to water, turn, thin and transplant the seedlings. It can be tedious caring for new life. And then the season started to turn. Easter. It's true too that an awareness of the liturgical seasons help us to be more in touch with our humanness as well as our eternal inheritance.

Through the Mysteries of Easter we are challenged to live more deeply rooted in the seasons of Christ:

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in



order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6: 3-4)

Life, Death, Resurrection. By our Baptism we are initiated in to a life of seasons. How are we aware of these seasons in our lives? How do we participate in the Life and Death of Christ so that we may also participate in the Resurrection?

The Liturgical Seasons come to mind: Advent, Lent, Easter (Preparing, Nurturing, Reaping.) The year starts with Advent. We are preparing for the birth of Jesus. But also getting ready for the second coming of Christ. Lent is a time where we take away and add. We are asked to reflect on things that distance us from God and change them - a death, if you will. We are also challenged to add things that bring us closer to God - life-giving. Easter is the direct result of death - new life. We celebrate the newness of life - in Jesus, in the life of the Church and in ourselves.

And we do it again and again and again - each year, each day, each moment when we breath in and out.

We are called to be a people deeply rooted in the Seasons of Christ. Not only through participating in the Liturgical Seasons of the year; but, through prayerful reflection of where in the continuum of Life, Death and Resurrection am I right now? This minute? This day? And since seasons are cyclical there is great comfort in knowing that where we are, right now, is right where we are supposed to be.

Life, Death, Resurrection - Sowing, Nurturing, Reaping, and Rest. These are the Seasons. By our nature we are called to connectedness with them. They will keep us rooted so that we may grow to the eternal. 

Venus is a Montessori teacher. She is member of Our Lady of Peace Parish where she serves on the Parish Council.

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Letters to the Editor:

As you may have noticed in our last issue, we would happily post your comments. We love to hear your feedback!

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all others.
Romans 12:4-5*

Call for Contributions:

Here is a thought to ponder. This passage will be the theme of the next issue of *The Visitation*. If you are inspired by this scripture passage and have the itch to write or draw for our next issue contact Venus.

venusad@nativity-house.org

Profile of a Saint

St. Isidore the Farmer and Maria Torribia

Justin Wozniak

May 15
Patron of Farmers, Day
Laborers and Against the
Death of Children

"He was favored with celestial visions and, it is said, the angels sometimes helped him in his work in the fields."

-Lives of the Saints

As we in Illinois enter the gardening season, we look to the example of St. Isidore the Farmer as a compelling example of sincerity and simplicity in our projects, plans, and work. Isidore and his wife, Maria, are an ancient example of holiness and a hopeful story of trust in divine providence - all in an agricultural setting.

Isidore was a simple Spanish farmer who lived around the year 1100. His profound spiritual devotion and remarkable humility brought him, after his death, worldwide renown- he is the patron of Madrid, Spain, the city nearest to where he lived.

Learning about work from Isidore's story might seem too easy- he was greatly aided in his work by tireless assistants. Stories about Isidore tell that he was aided by angels, resulting in his ability to outperform other laborers by significant factors or to accomplish tasks while pausing for prayer. On a deeper level, however, Isidore's work was performed with little regard for his own talents or abilities and reflected a proper

detachment from his tasks. He realized that he was not working alone, and that the outcomes were not his concern.

Further, Isidore showed a healthy disregard for the fruits of his labors as well. In a lesser known story, Isidore dumps out half of his freshly

harvested grain for a flock of hungry birds. Later on, it was discovered that this was done with no measurable loss to the sacks. This is an image of generosity, and a recognition that the ultimate goal of his work was not personal gain. Food is grown to resolve hunger, not earn a profit, and Isidore demonstrated his priorities in a profound way and at risk of personal loss.

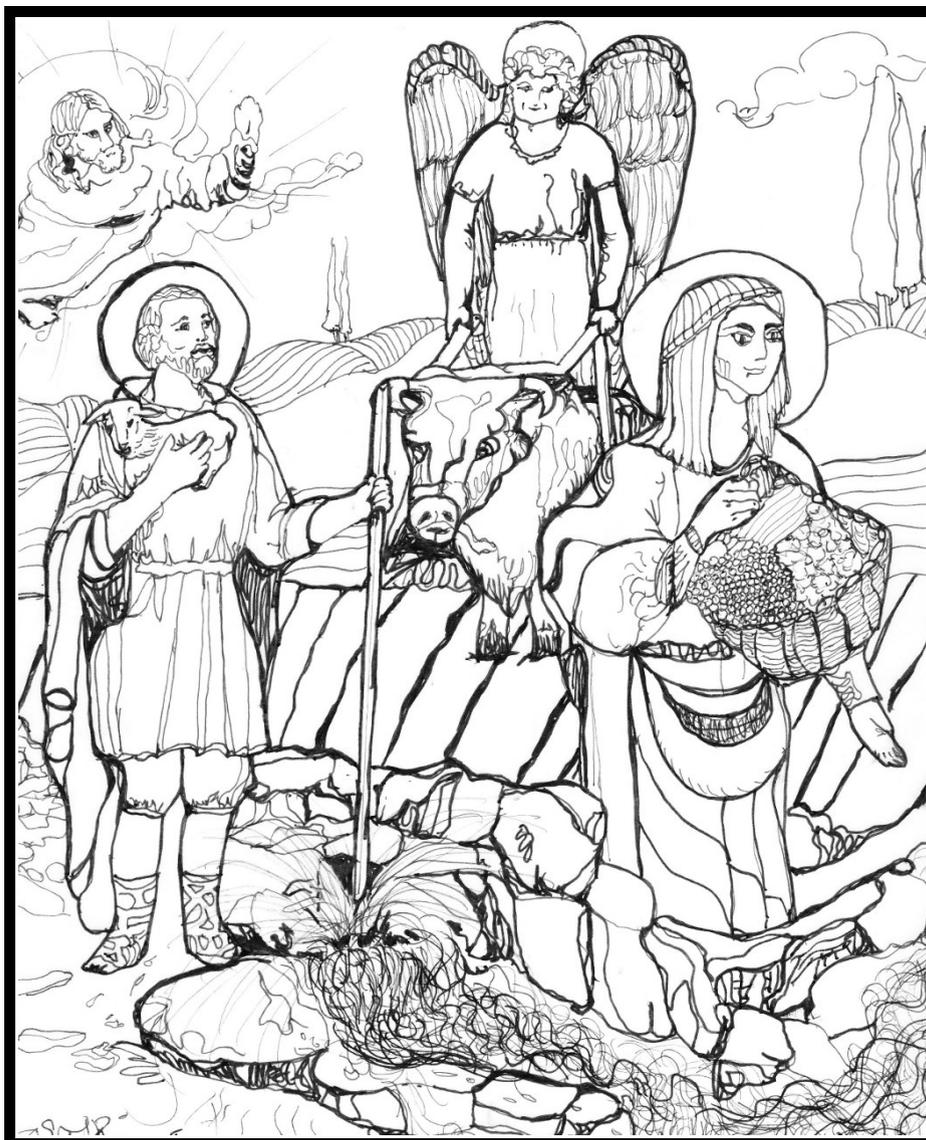
Isidore, also known as "the Laborer", is also a source of reflection with respect to the place of manual laborers in our value system as

represented by the national economy. Clearly, Isidore's mortal life had a small role to play in the Kingdom of Castile. The value of Isidore's life and work would have been nearly imperceptible to a common observer. However, on closer inspection, Isidore was a champion of the spiritual life and heroic in charity to those even poorer than he was. His example is pertinent in that his worth could not possibly be evaluated by ordinary measurement, and is a reminder of the limited utility of conventional viewpoints on labor and workers.

Maria, the wife of Isidore, was also a deeply pious person who shared in a life a prayer. Maria's family life was marked by tragedy- their only son died in childhood. Thus, the couple are known for the patronage "against the death of children." This sorrowful story - not the stuff of legends - shows that an upright, hard-working life is no protection from disaster and loss. The family shows that the virtues faith, hope, and charity are not a recipe for non-stop bliss but a challenge to be accepted in the presence of hardship. As we emerge from this hard winter, we can keep in mind the steady lifestyle of this holy couple as we look forward to the summer to come. 🏠

Prayer

God, through the intercession of St. Isidore, the holy Farmer, grant that we may overcome all feelings of pride. May we always serve You with that humility which pleases You, through his merits and example.
Amen.



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THE VISITATION

Special Issue: *Sowing Season*

- *Right Relationship*
- *Women & Birth*
- *House update*