



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

DECEMBER 2015

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1

No room at the Inn

by Venus Wozniak

A few years ago at the Christmas Eve Vigil I heard this story during the homily given by Cardinal DiNardo of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

There was a young man with developmental delays – we will call him Danny. His class was to put on a Christmas play. The teacher put him in the role of the innkeeper. The class practiced and practiced. Danny knew his part perfectly. The night of the performance Mary and Joseph came to the door and asked for a room. Danny opened the door and smiled a big confident smile as he delivered his line, “there is no room.” Mary and Joseph after seeking out other options return to the inn to ask, “Are you sure that you have no room for us?” Danny, confidence wavering a bit, “I am sure, we have no room.” Mary and Joseph set out again. It was becoming a desperate situation as it was apparent the time of birth is drawing near. They knock at the door of the inn yet again, this time with a humble plea, “Please, do you have a place for us? My wife is with child and the time is coming this very night. Please, do you have a place for us?” This time, despite weeks of rehearsal, Danny’s face fell, he started sob, “Ok, yes! Yes! You can come in Jesus!”

In Danny’s innocence and the heightened emotion of opening

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Mary, Mother of God

by Theresa Marten

As this Advent and Christmas rapidly approach, we prepare for the birth of Jesus. Our natural inclination is to be drawn toward the baby Jesus and how the human and divine come together through his birth on here on Earth. While at the Nativity House, I have had the privilege to witness and walk with a woman as she prepared for the birth of her daughter. Through her journey of uncertainty, fright, frustration, anticipation, and overwhelming love, our community was able to participate and witness what it was like for her and also Mary to prepare for such a beautiful gift.

Just as Jesus' birth is God's kingdom becoming incarnate on Earth, so is each child an incarnation of God's kingdom. It is because of mothers who are able to chose life, despite difficulty and organizations such

as Nativity House who support and provide hospitality for those seeking hospitality.

God choosing to send Jesus as a vulnerable, infant completely dependent on his mother to nourish and protect him rather than coming down as fully grown, shows God's desire to connect and share completely in our experiences. Both Mary and our guest mom both had to take the news of their pregnancy to the father and families. They both made a brave decision to keep and protect the infant, despite possible social consequences. These women of valor sought out hospitality of others, Mary in the stable, and our guest mom here at the Nativity House.

What a beautiful and deep connection Mary must have felt to the little baby swimming and kicking inside her. Our guest

mom often said, it was when she was resting that the baby would move the most. Watching and walking with our guest mom as she continued into her second trimester, I'm sure Mary waddled around her town and tried to keep busy as much as she could.

Just as Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" our community began to see the grace in our guestimate as Elizabeth saw in Mary.

As the due date approached, our community grew anxious and naturally felt a heightened sense of urgency that anytime we were to leave, the baby could come. As Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, I am certain Mary felt the discomfort and Joseph the anxiety to find

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A Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

It is in the spirit of joyful anticipation of the season of Advent that I write. The December issue of *The Visitation* is the anniversary issue. This means that we embark on sixth year of publication. As I look back on the last five years, it is with much joy, awe and wonder. Looking forward, there is the joyful anticipation of what our next year will hold.

Nativity House has grown by leaps and bounds over the last year. Our first community members, live-in volunteers (or interns), joined us last spring. We have celebrated the welcoming of our first guest mom, the birth of her child, and their transition out of the house. The farm continues to grow with new plantings of blueberries, strawberries, apples and asparagus. We finished out the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) season with 8 families gathered around the table for a Harvest Feast. We have gathered in our living room with new and old friends for Round-table Discussions on The Gospels and Poverty and Pope Francis and his first encyclical. We have been especially blessed to be able to celebrate Mass here on site with Fr. Mark Fracaro.

Currently, we are in the process of interviewing new guest moms. We hope to have a new mother all moved in and settled by the beginning of Advent. In the spring, we will have a second room available. We will be able to offer hospitality to two guest moms! Come February, it will be time to start with the CSA 2016. There are murmurings of the possibility of acquiring two alpacas so that we can begin our work in the fiber arts. You can stay connected to the goings on of Nativity House through our Facebook Page. We update it regularly.

The Nativity House community is a bustle with work, love and hospitality. We are blessed. Join us in prayer, charity and community. If you would like to be involved in the work of Nativity House please don't hesitate to contact us!

Peace, love and joy to you and yours!

Venus & Justin Wozniak
Directors, Nativity House

Wish List

Prayers

Stamps

30 cup coffee percolator

Queen head-board, dresser & desk

Maternity Store/Target Gift Cards

Sponsor an Intern

Sponsor a Guest Mom

About The Visitation

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

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We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

No room at the Inn

night the desperate need of the Holy Family became overwhelming. Danny truly accepted the Guest.

In the last few months I have become increasingly aware of the plight of the homeless. There is no doubt that this awareness stems largely from opening our home to our first guest mom. Watching her navigate the affordable housing market (or lack thereof) and sharing in her frustration has been discouraging.

The Section 8 Voucher system in Will County has an 8 year waiting list. The Dupage Section 8 list is no better: it has been closed since September 2010. When inquiring about how this can possibly be, the answers span the gamut – people don't move out, there are not enough Section 8 properties, landlords deny Section 8 vouchers to begin with. These are symptoms of system that is sorely broken.

This brings up a long list of questions: Who is on that list? Where are they living? How are their needs being met? Why isn't there more affordable housing available? Why are people not moving out? What programs are in place to help families take necessary steps to move on? And better yet, why have I not heard of this before? Why is this not in the news?

I spoke with Sr. Joanne Vallero, Director of Outreach at St. Dennis Parish, here in Lockport, IL. She distributes assistance – grocery or gas gift cards, material needs, maybe a few dollars to help offset an overdue utility bill – to roughly 50 families a month in Lockport, IL. I asked her about the plight

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of the poor and homeless in our community. She too had experiences with helping those in need navigate the affordable housing market. Sr. Joanne asserted that housing is the single most need of the poor in our community. So many that she sees transition from one unstable location to another – spending the night on a friends couch or with an elderly disabled parent, or in the most dire situations, sleeping in a storage unit.

My heart and mind have been reeling ever since. There is a huge disparity in our diocesan community. The average cost of a two bedroom apartment is \$900. That leaves a person to an 89 hour work week at minimum wage. This is largely the reason that once someone makes it into affordable housing, why they don't move on. They can't

afford to move on.

It is no coincidence that our newborn Savior had no place to lay his head. Jesus being born into poverty is not only foreshadowing his life, death and resurrection but, our call to Christian life.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a

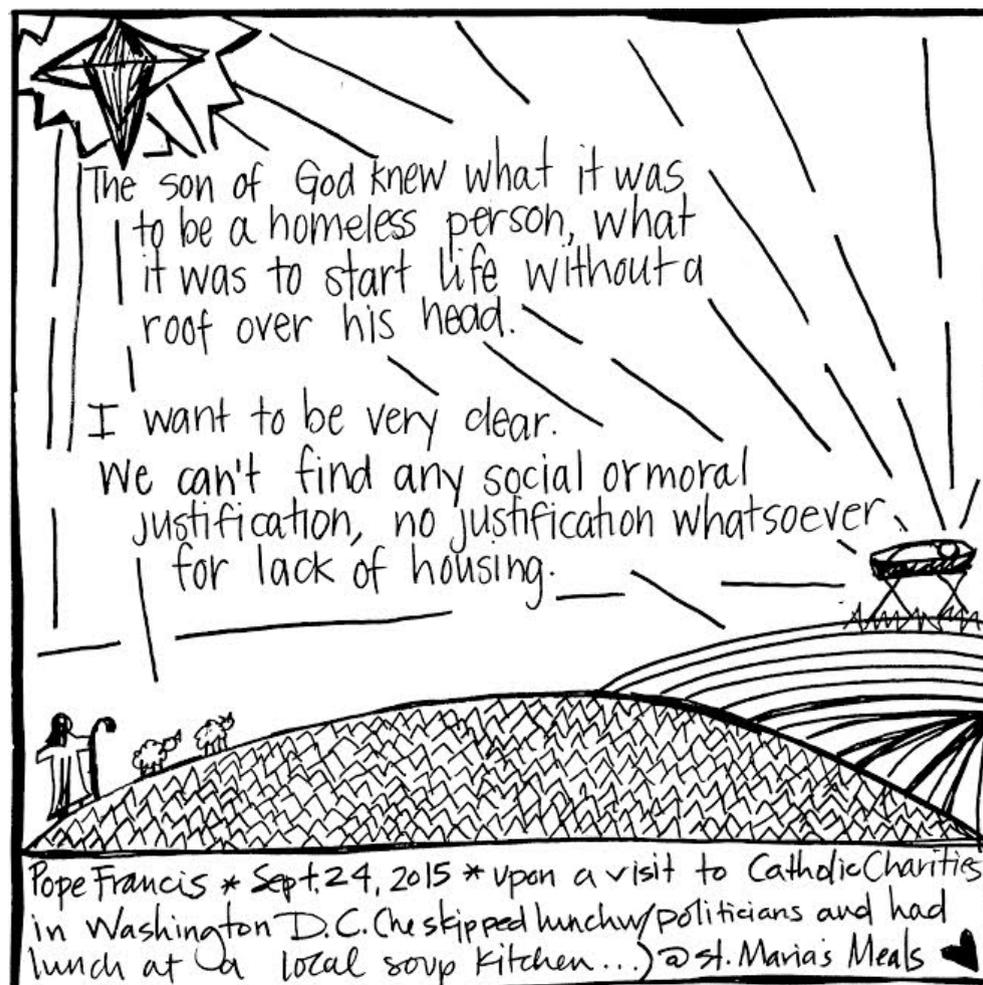
stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:34-40)

Jesus made it very clear that in order to inherit the kingdom, we must serve the poor. In this parable of the sheep and goats – those sheep who did His will inherit the kingdom. The goats are not so lucky.

As I ponder the plight of homelessness and the broken system that we have entrusted our homeless to I also think of the early Christians. In those early days just after Jesus ascended into heaven, the Apostles being empowered by the Holy Spirit did their best to carry on as Jesus was with them. And he was not only with them in Spirit but in word, deed and Body and Blood. They rallied together and all members of the community always had what they needed.

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles'

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World Meeting of Families

by Katie Neu

It was in September of 2014 that I first heard about the World Meeting of Families, a Congress held every three years sponsored by Holy See's Pontifical Council for the Family. Even though I have been involved in ministry for a number of years, I had never heard about this event that was started by Saint John Paul II in 1994. The World Meeting of Families which was held this year from September 22-25 in Philadelphia, PA, brought together Catholic families from around the world for talks and workshops surrounding family issues.

I work in Family Faith Formation, at St. Jude Parish in New Lenox, IL so when I heard the title of the Congress my interest was piqued. I help to run a Faith Formation program where parents are the main catechists of their children and the majority of their religious education takes place in the home. We are all about empowering the family here at St. Jude, so this looked like something I should attend and bring other parishioners with me. I then heard that Pope Francis would be attending the closing events of the Congress. Not only would I be able to gather with Catholic families from around the world to hear fantastic speakers and discuss how to strengthen the family, I might have the opportunity to see the Pope! I was there!

After almost a year of planning and forming our small, but strong, group of pilgrims from St. Jude and surrounding parishes, we were ready to go! I was nervous; I had never attended a world-wide Catholic event like this before. I was also worried about leaving St. Jude

for a whole week during September to be the Director of a Faith Formation program and to leave at the beginning of the school year? I didn't know what to expect, but I felt that the Holy Spirit was calling me to attend and that the Spirit would protect and guide us.

Twenty thousand people attended this year's World Meeting of Families, it is hard to wrap your mind around that number until you are sitting in the biggest room you have ever been in and it is full of people and you are all praying the Our Father during the opening Mass on the first afternoon of the Congress. Everyone was there, young and old from all over the world, speaking different languages but praying together; It was beautiful. To be surrounded by the depth and breadth of the Church is almost indescribable.

The theme of the 2015 World Meeting of Families was "Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive." The Preparatory

Catechism for the Congress describes the theme in this way, "God works through us. We have a mission. We are in the world for a purpose—to receive God's love and to show God's love to others. God seeks to heal a broken universe. He asks us to be his witnesses and helpers in that work."

These few sentences set my heart on fire for those I serve at St. Jude; this is why I am so passionate about Family Faith Formation. It is my wish that all families know God's love for them and that they are so in love with God that they must show that love to others. Through all of the keynotes and breakout sessions of the Congress, this love for the family was set more ablaze in my heart. With every talk, every homily, every interaction I had with the other pilgrims, I was affirmed in my ministry, that we are on the right track by focusing on the family.

I was not only affirmed in my ministry during the Congress, I was empowered for, God willing, my future ministry as a parent. The Congress had a beautiful Adoration Chapel

where pilgrims could go anytime for prayer, to find some peace and get back in touch with the one we were really hoping to encounter during the Congress, Jesus Christ. I visited the Adoration Chapel during lunch. I prayed, read the Gospel of the day, meditated on the verses, and then I sat in silence as I waited for Jesus to respond. At this point in the Congress I was feeling overwhelmed by the awesome responsibility that is parenting. I was scared that I would not do a good enough job to bring my children to Christ and that no matter what I did, they would reject all that I love so much about our Catholic faith. I was scared that I would fail at the thing that I had wanted to be all my life, a mother. As I sat there in the Chapel in front of Jesus Christ, I heard his voice and I wrote it down. This is a little bit of what Jesus told me, "For I tell you, do not worry. Holy are those who trust in the Lord. You are a good and faithful servant. I love you. I am in control. Do what you can

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God works through us.
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-to receive God's love
and to show God's love to others.
God seeks to heal a broken
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in that work.

PREPARATORY CATECHISM for WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2015

Pope Francis and American Catholics

by Matt Ochalek

Like so many American Catholics, I eagerly awaited Pope Francis' visit to the United States. I was filled with anticipation. While the canonization of St. Junipero Serra began his visit, and the World Meeting of Families brought it to conclusion, it was anticipating Pope Francis' speeches at the White House, a joint session of Congress, and the UN General Assembly that transfixed me. With so many engagements in a short amount of time, what would the Holy Father say? I could only hope that he would continue his prophetic proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the belly of the beast that is the global center of the consumer economy and military industrial complex. I was not disappointed.

As I listened to Pope Francis' somewhat labored English language address to the United States Congress, I began to smile as I heard the name Abraham Lincoln. I nearly leapt from my seat when the next name was Martin Luther King, Jr. These great Americans, symbols of liberty and inclusion, are role models for all people of good will. Yet, it was the final two names, Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, which brought me to stillness and awe. In my own spiritual journey, Merton and Day figure prominently among my influences. Coming of age in the throes of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, I was more than once frustrated enough with the hierarchy to chuck my baptism to the wind (as if that were possible). It was Merton and Day with their similar, though separate, run-ins with ecclesiastical authorities and dogged fidelity to the Tradition

that kept me within the Church.

The contemporaneous lives of Merton and Day were distinct, but intertwined. From the cloister, Merton became an essential critic of a society losing its moral compass. He addressed a wide range of issues including totalitarianism, racism, the arms race, war in Vietnam and the consumer culture that put profits before people. Merton rarely minced words, whether in public tracts or private letters. In one particular letter to Day about the Church and nuclear war, for example, he wrote:

One would certainly wish that the Catholic position on nuclear war held as strictly as the Catholic position on birth control. It seems a little strange that we are so wildly exercised about the "murder" (and the word is of course correct) of an unborn infant by abortion, or even the prevention of conception which is hardly murder, and yet accept without a qualm the extermination of millions of helpless and innocent adults, some of whom may be Christians and even our friends rather than our enemies. I submit that we ought to fulfill the one without omitting the other.

For her part, not only did Day engage in the same social criticism, she took direct action to feed, clothe, and house the outcasts and resist U.S. war-making as co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. It is, I believe, Merton and Day who show the way to a 21st century American Catholicism that is faithful to magisterial teaching and the authority of



Pope Francis addresses the United States Congress

conscience that we desperately need in our increasingly post-Christian society.

Pope Francis moved on the next day from Congress to New York City to address the United Nations General Assembly. There, he offered a detailed, five-page address building on traditional notions of justice and the vision of his predecessor Blessed Paul VI, the first modern pope to take his mission as universal shepherd out of Rome and to the global peripheries. Dr. Meghan Clark of St. John's University offers five "signposts" from the Holy Father's speech through the Jesuit ministry America Media. These are: 1. Global structures must be inclusive. 2. Dignity of Environment (and protecting its rights) 3. Destruction of the Environment & Exclusion of Persons are Connected 4. Remember: Persons not Statistics 5. See, Judge, but then We Must ACT.

For followers of Pope Francis, whether his letters, homilies, and speeches or just his Twitter account, these signposts are nothing new. Nevertheless, Dr. Clark beautifully summarizes what Pope Francis refers to as integral human ecology. Exclusion and

exploitation of the land and human beings are inextricably linked. Therefore real solutions to the world's problems must address both the natural and social environments. Routinely, and most often in the same breath, the Holy Father reminds us that as we identify problems we must act to change them.

In the days that followed his visit, we learned that Pope Francis was engaging our own nation's policies, encouraging immediate and concrete changes in the death penalty. There is no way to know for certain, but it seems that his letter reaching out to the governor of Oklahoma helped achieve a stay of execution for Richard Glossip, whose conviction is dubious. Unfortunately, his similar attempt at intervention was unable to save the life of Kelly Gissendaner, whom the state of Georgia executed on 30 September 2015. As usual, the journey toward justice includes both victories and losses along the way.

It also became clear that Pope Francis hopes to broker an agreement on action to combat climate change so that the world community may avert the

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Francis and America*...continued from page 4*

coming global ecological disaster that many of the world's poorest are already forced to deal with, whether they are indigenous islanders losing their ancestral lands to rising sea levels or subsistence farmers losing everything to drought. Just as Pope Francis celebrated the improved ties he arranged between Cuba and the U.S. by traveling in that order. We can only hope that he pulls off such a feat again in protection of our common home.

The take away, I believe, is this: we can only hope in Pope Francis' leadership as much as we are willing to engage our communities, locally and globally, to bring his vision to fruition. I think he would agree with me. As he said to thousands of young people at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro:

I hope there will be noise... I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves. The parishes, the schools, the institutions are made for going out... May the bishops and priests forgive me if some of you create a bit of confusion afterward. That's my advice. Thanks for whatever you can do.

I plan to take that advice. I hope that you will join me.



Matthew Ochalek is a husband and father, theology teacher and member of Mary the Apostle House in Erie, PA.

Mary, Mother of God

rest so that this beautiful, but very pregnant woman could relax.

The labor was mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically intensive. Although our guest mom was frightened and very uncomfortable, there was a moment where she understood her responsibility for her child. The fear did not disappear completely, but a sense of peace and determination came over her face. This empowering moment of motherhood, womanhood, and humanity will never leave me.

Just as our guest mom brought a beautiful, perfect baby girl into this world, Mary brought a handsome, perfect baby boy to her world. The first moment Jesus was laid on Mary's chest and felt her heartbeat on his, is when Mary

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felt completely and unconditionally in love with her son.

Both women nourished their children naturally, fell asleep holding their children, and imagined the future in which they would grow up in. For both women, I'm sure the world appeared scary. For Mary, there was fear of death and even a promise that Jesus would experience pain, for our guest mom, there are countless examples of hatred, prejudice, and terrorism threatening our very being.

We cannot all be mothers, but we have the choice to support life in its entirety. We all come into this world humble and dependent on one another. That sense of humbleness and interconnectedness should never leave, but empower us to use the life we have been given to bring



the Kingdom of God here on Earth with us.

If we are ever feeling lost or needing a loving hand, Mary the Mother of God, is also our heavenly Mother. Just as she nourished, encouraged, comforted, and empowered her Son, she is there to do the same for us. This is also a time to remember our own mothers whether living or deceased and ask for the Blessed Virgin's intercession for them.

Is Mary not a perfect example of sacrifice and willingness to completely put her life in God's hand? Every night during our community night prayer I am reminded of the words of wisdom and joy she spoke to Elizabeth after she was recognized for the first time as Mary, Mother of God:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; Behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
(Luke 1:46-55)



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Round-table round-up

by Margaret Motto

Peter Maurin is a person that I am fascinated by as I read about his thoughts and looked at how he lived his life. He was a man who would not settle for good enough when it came to serving the poor and navigating what love in action looks like. He was committed to striving for the ideal. Idealism is a word that has negative connotations, often seen as the intangible, naive view of how things should be in an ideal world. But Maurin would argue that striving for the ideal takes commitment, courage and sacrifice from people of faith who are committed to living in a way that is truly for the common good. Maurin said, “we need Houses of Hospitality to show what idealism looks like when it is practiced.”

As a House of Hospitality rooted in the tradition of the Catholic Worker, Nativity House holds round-table discussions to bring together people connected to the community with the purpose that Maurin laid out for round-table discussions, the clarification of thought.

On Sunday October 25, we hosted a round-table discussion focused on the topic of Poverty and the Gospels. We shared a delicious potluck meal and then centered ourselves on the topic for the evening. The questions we focused on were: How would the poor describe solidarity with the poor and how can we tangibly live out solidarity with the poor on a personal, local and global level?

There were about ten people present, all with different ethnic backgrounds, ages, and levels of experience with the Catholic Worker. As we unpacked the word solidarity, we arrived at the prime example of solidarity,

Jesus Himself.

Through our discussion, we established that solidarity is living, walking, sharing and advocating for one another. Jesus instructed his disciples through His parables and intentional actions in His ministry. Jesus healed and visited the most marginalized people in His time, but He also turned over the money changers tables in the temple. We are called to follow in his example of not only expressing our deep love and commitment to the poor through donations of time, talents, and money, but we must address those who exploit the poor. When we are in tune with our own brokenness, aren't afraid to make ourselves vulnerable with the people we serve and have compassion, we can develop an authentic relationship with the poor. Speaking on behalf of those who are voiceless, but also empowering our brothers and sisters so they can speak on their own behalf is how we begin to shake these flawed structures.

Looking back at the round-table discussion, I see it as a spark that will light the fire in each of our hearts to consider more deeply how each of us individually can live in solidarity with the poor in our lives and allow that to permeate our families, communities and our world.

The next round-table discussion will be Sunday, February 7 focusing on the Christian call to nonviolence. Join us as we continue to seek the answers to the questions that really matter.

Margaret is a Nativity House intern. She can be contacted at:

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Easy Essays:

The Program of the Catholic Worker

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)

The purpose of the Catholic Workers' School is to bring Catholic thought to Catholic workers so as to prepare them for Catholic Action.

The program of the Catholic Workers' school is a three-point program:

- 1. round-table discussions**
- 2. houses of hospitality**
- 3. farming communes.**

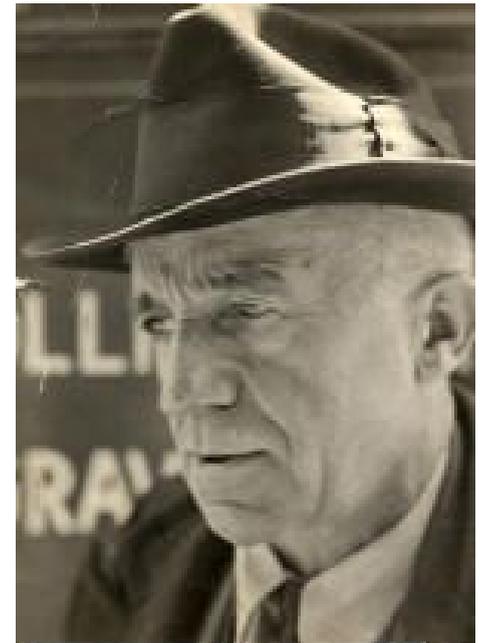
We need round table discussions to keep trained minds from being academic.

We need round-table discussions to keep untrained minds from being superficial.

We need round-table discussions to learn from scholars how things would be, if they were as they should be. to things as they should be.

We need communes to help the unemployed to help themselves.

We need communes to make scholars out of workers and workers out of scholars to substitute a technique of ideals for our technique of deals.



We need round-table discussions to learn from scholars how a path can be made from things as they are to things as they should be.

We need communes to help the unemployed to help themselves.

We need communes to make scholars out of workers and workers out of scholars, to substitute a technique of ideals for our technique of deals.



World Meeting of Families

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and I will take care of the rest.”
 Every time I read these words in my journal and even as I type them now, I am moved to tears because I know these are the words of God given to me in direct response to my prayer. Jesus gave me a mash up of Matthew 6:25 and Jeremiah 17:7 and then he spoke directly to my heart and I found peace.
 My time at the World Meeting of Families was a great lesson in trusting the Lord. I had no idea what was going to happen, so all I could do was trust God and everything went well. From the flights being on time to the hotel picking up our bags at the airport so we could get to Mass on time, to the train conductors being patient with us as we paid for our tickets, to always finding great places to eat, to no one getting lost, sick, or hurt. God was in control of this pilgrimage and God did not let us down.
 Everyone in our pilgrimage group had a special encounter with Christ during the World

Meeting of Families and I am glad that I am able to share mine with you. I will end with a quote from Pope Francis’ Homily at the closing Mass for the World Meeting of Families that took place on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway on September 27.
“Love is shown by little things, by attention to small daily signs which make us feel at home. Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life, and life to grow in faith. Jesus tells us not to hold back these little miracles. Instead, he wants us to encourage them, to spread them. He asks us to go through life, our everyday life, encouraging all these little signs of love as signs of his own living and active presence in our world.”

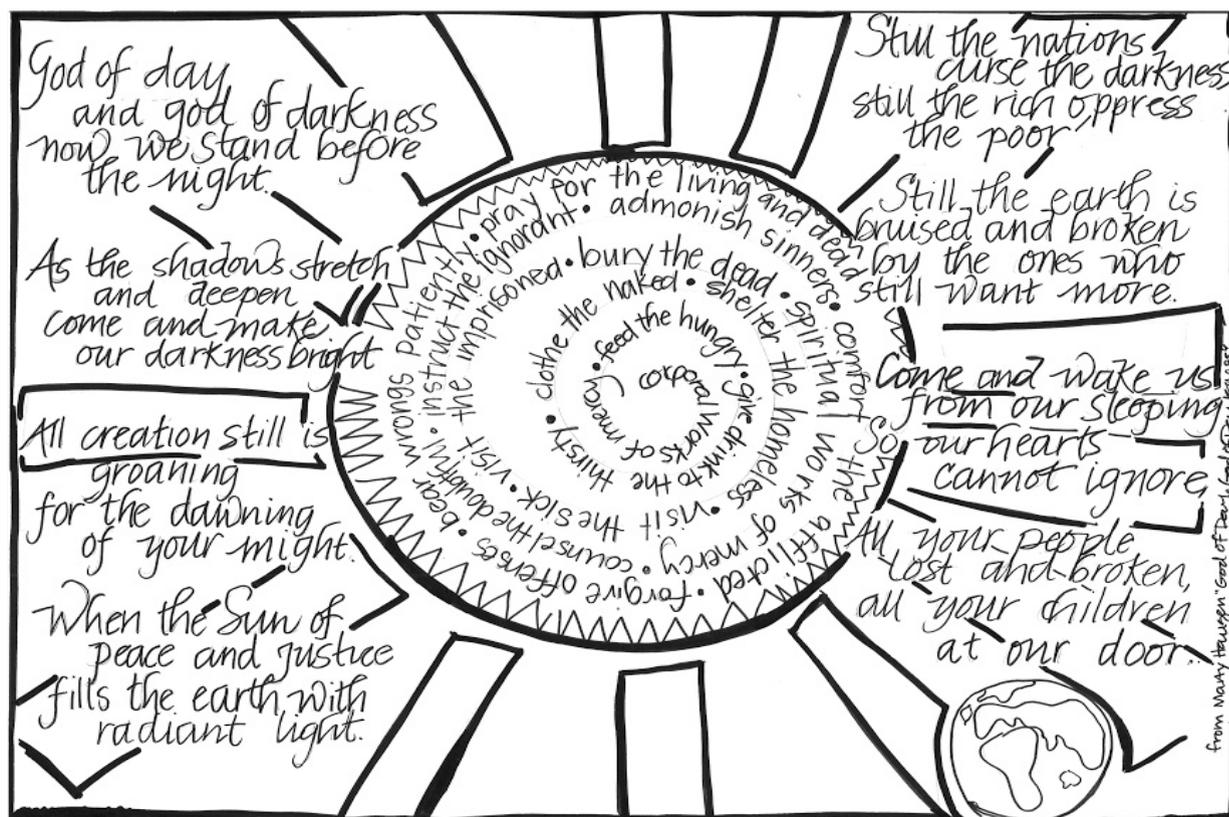
Katie Neu is the Director of Family Faith Formation at St. Jude in New Lenox, IL.

No room at the inn

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feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts of Apostles 4: 32-35)
 This tradition of caring for the neediest in the community continued for the first 300 years of Christianity. Those are the years when we were still on the underground, a counter-cultural movement. There have been a few prophets of our time that have heralded the need to return to this model. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement put this ancient tradition into practice with their houses of hospitality and farming communes. Peter Maurin was adamant that each parish should have a house of hospitality in order to minister for the poor of each parish. Dorothy Day, famously said, “our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy rotten system.”
 Today it is very easy for us to say, “there is a government system for that; Catholic

Charities will take care of that; we have a social service agency for that.” While a wildly popular stance, it is also wildly wrong. We have gotten to a very strange place where we allow politicians decide the fate of least of His people. We, His people, are responsible for the least of His people. The time is now to become masters of subsidiarity – that is the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ should be taken care of at the lowest level. We can no longer leave their needs to the bureaucracies of state and federal governments.
 A few months ago when regarding the Syrian refugees, Pope Francis called for each parish to take in at least one refugee family. What if we took the words of Pope Francis and Peter Maurin to heart? What if each parish in your diocese did open a house of hospitality? There is no doubt that the Spirit endowed to us in Baptism and Confirmation would empower us to do the work; that is if we are willing.



 Danny couldn't help but let Jesus in. It is hard to imagine denying a sweet, snugly Jesus a place to lay his head. But it happened. And it happens to millions of families with children daily.
 Hope comes from Jesus Christ alive in each of us.
 Venus is a Director of the Nativity House. She can be contacted at:
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Catholic Social Teaching: Reflections from Lewis University Student Leaders

Care for God's Creation

by Lexi Austring

At Lewis University, we have a social justice retreat called Catalyst, and we do quite a bit to prepare ourselves as leaders for the experience. Working at the Nativity House for a day with Catalyst was a blessing. It was fun and it exemplified the values of Catholic Social Teaching, which we learn at Lewis since we are a private, Catholic institution. While we were there, the six of us helped clear foliage that was overgrown so the space could be used for parking and storage for wood, we helped prepare lunch and clean up afterwards, and we helped organize the compost pile. It was a joy to work together for the House, to improve it and aid their mission. This exemplifies the Catholic Social Teaching value of the Call to Community.



We did everything together. Lunch was the product of all our efforts, including the efforts of those before us to grow the vegetables we used, from the House's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). We worked together for the well-being of each other, each of us volunteering to do more. The House itself creates a Call to Family by supporting and valuing family through their mission of helping first time mothers and living as a family in

community.

In addition, we participated in the Teaching of Care for God's Creation. Through our service we showed concern and respect for the environment by not damaging it and only tearing apart what was needed. What we clipped from the ground went back to the ground in a different location instead of being burned or thrown away, and the flowers were to go in a special location so they could reproduce and add to the beauty of the yard. Almost

Rights and Responsibilities

by Marek Blizinski

When I finally found out that I became a leader for Catalyst I was really happy and proud at the same time. Then I found out that I was recommended to join a program called Faith Behind Bars. Faith Behind Bars, is where we write letters once a week to an incarcerated person that we are assigned to so that they don't think that people forgot about them. For me, the two Catholic Social Teachings that stand out while doing this is Human Dignity and Rights and Responsibilities.

Human dignity is an individual or group's sense of self-respect and self-worth, physical and psychological integrity and empowerment. The principle of human dignity is trying to teach us is that all humans were created in the image and likeness of God and that their life is considered sacred. Each person has value and are worth of great respect and must be free from slavery, manipulation, and exploitation. The way how human dignity relates to Faith Behind Bars, is that even though these people have done something bad at some point in their lives and have to sit out their punishment, they are people no matter what

and should be treated with dignity just as we are outside prison.

Rights and responsibilities in the Catholic Social teaching aspect represent that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Since I am writing to a person that I was assigned to, I try to respect his rights and responsibilities, which as a result I am preserving and respecting his human dignity. The way how Rights and Responsibilities relate to Faith Behind Bars, is that if I give the incarcerated person the same rights and responsibilities that I have then

everything we used for lunch was plant-based. Furthermore, Venus used all organic (straight from the backyard) ingredients for the dishwasher detergent and was working how to do the same with laundry detergent. A big part of our work included caring for the environment and using it in a respectful manner. Our use of the environment exemplified the I-Thou relationship Pope Francis says that we should all exhibit with ourselves and the world. This means not seeing others, including the natural world, as things, but as living creatures needing respect. Instead of dominance and superiority, we showed care and concern, as what we were doing was good for us, the Earth, and the people Nativity House sought to help. I'm really glad we spent time at the Nativity House and used that opportunity to participate in life there for a few hours.



that person has something to live for because s/he knows that somebody out in the world cares and thinks about she/him and doesn't look upon what s/he did but looks at who s/he really is as a human being.

In my opinion, the way how human dignity and rights and responsibilities go hand in hand is that if the person's human dignity is taken away than that person's rights and responsibilities are taken away and vice versa. So if we really want to preserve these Catholic Social Teachings, than we should put ourselves in the shoes of the other person and experience what they are going through.



Solidarity

by Trevor Doloski

My experience with the Church of the Precious Blood was enlightening and a fantastic learning experience. From the moment I stepped out of the van I felt as though the church grounds stood out in the community, but at the same time felt welcoming to the neighborhood. The garden outside, that residents could use to grow and cultivate crops from, showed a deep sense of community. Once inside, we met with the families who congregated together at the church, despite us being complete outsiders and not knowing anyone in the room, they were quick to introduce themselves. They welcomed us with smiles and open hands. The biggest surprise I got was when the children, who were roughly six to eight years old, asked me to play games with them. I never expected that the children would be so open to interact with strangers.

Finally the Mass came and I will admit that it was my favorite Mass I've had in my life. The idea of having everyone face each other in a circle was brilliant and helped me establish a brotherhood with the rest of the people in the room. The Mass itself was about the same as in other established churches, but more informal and closer knit. Everyone shared about those who they felt needed prayers and explained why they needed them. It was one of the few times I ever felt part of a family with people in a congregation.

The whole experience showed me that the Church of the Precious Blood establishes solidarity among its members in the community.

Solidarity is one of the most important aspects of Catholic Social Teaching and I was glad to find it as a core value of what they represent and live by. The church has showed me that the word "community" doesn't just represent those who live around us. It's anyone and everyone who is in need and wishes join us as a child of God. We are one human family with a diverse national, economic, racial, ethnic, and ideological makeup.

I live by those words and I'm happy to know the Church of the Precious also lives by these words.



Dignity of the Human Person

by Joseph Baltuska

In 2014, on a very cold Saturday afternoon, I had taken part in the 5th annual Catalyst retreat. Catalyst is a social justice retreat that takes place in Chicago. On Catalyst, we learned about the negative side of giving into the stigmas that plague the homeless men and women on the city streets of Chicago. I was a sophomore in college and I took a chance getting involved on campus and decided to see how the others live. On the retreat, everyone was placed into student small groups. Our small group visited a home that took in runaway youth. This was an exercise into

getting to know people around our same age who live differently.

While it could have been an ordinary Saturday where we do homework, go work out, or meet up with friends, that day required us to think what we take for granted; a home and family to come back to. I remember making pasta and fruit salad with the other retreatants and youth. As a group, we were all fairly new to getting to know each other. It felt great to work with one another and bond. Our conversations started off quiet, but once we started playing UNO at the table, I began to feel more connected. We ate all together at lunch, even though we come from different class backgrounds, there was a sense of openness.

Being open to the poor and vulnerable allows us to break down class barriers and enjoy each other's company. God put on this earth to love and respect each other. While this is a challenge for everyone in their everyday life, it's a principle that we as Catholics must remember to uphold.

Those teenagers who lived in the home that took them in from their domestic issues, had goals of college and working for living as well. Seeing these teenagers, only a couple of years younger than I was, opened my eyes and made me realize that teens, no matter the circumstance, still have goals and their services like runaway safe havens to show them the light and lead the way. We had more in common than in differences, which is something I hope to always remember.



The heart of man can be full of so much pain, even when things are exteriorly "all right." It becomes all the more difficult because today we are used to thinking that there are explanations for everything. But there is no explanation of most of what goes on in our own hearts, and we cannot account for it all. No use resorting to the kind of mental tranquilizers that even religious explanations sometimes offer. Faith must be deeper than that, rooted in the unknown and in the abyss of darkness that is the ground of our being. No use teasing the darkness to try to make answers grow out of it. But if we learn how to have a deep inner patience, things solve themselves, or God solves them if you prefer: but do not expect to see how. Just learn to wait, and do what you can and help other people. Often it is in helping someone else, we find the best way to bear our own trouble.

- Thomas Merton from his Christmas letter, 1966

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

by Nicholas Quinlan

My experience with Trinity Services is something that has impacted me beyond what I expected. Trinity Services is a home in which adults with both mental and physical disabilities are immersed back into a community where they are able to live their lives along with society and not be isolated because of their differences. Trinity services is a place where these men are living in a community with one another along with a worker who is there to help them through their daily routine, but at the same allow the men to do the things they are able to do on their own. The place where I went for Trinity Services had 6 men whom all had their own unique personalities, and it was shocking at how well all these

personalities meshed. What it seemed to me was that these men were one big family all living under the same roof. The ability for these men to live together was something that I found to be truly amazing because in our society we always seem to isolate those who are different from ourselves. Those who do not mend into the social norm of society are outsiders. But at Trinity Services, there were no outsiders, there were no outcasts. There were six men who welcomed us in as guests in their home for an afternoon.

In my afternoon with these men, my eyes were truly opened to the simple things in life that truly fill our hearts with joy. There was one man in particular that touched my heart, and truly

opened my eyes in the few hours I spent there. His name was Eric, and he had a personality that I couldn't help but compare to my own. Eric was the last of them men we met that day, and when we did meet him he was hesitant to even say hello. Within 15 minutes, Eric had everything in the world to talk about. Eric and I talked about firetrucks, we watched football together, and we even created our own unique handshake. To Eric, I went from a complete stranger to a good friend. This was the impact that touched my heart. Seeing the joy in Eric's face as we talked about fire trucks, or the energy he got from having half a cup of coffee was truly amazing to me. Eric

was happy just to have us there to spend time with him. It was the simple things that day that opened my mind and heart to the stereotypes that are made by society. I left that house that day with a new outlook of what can truly bring joy into my life, and I want to thank Eric and the men that I met at Trinity Services that day.

Since, I have returned to Trinity services once, and when I returned I was remembered. I was welcomed by these men with a fist bump and a Bubble gum song, which was one of the most rewarding feelings ever.



Call to Family, Community, & Participation

by Kylie Walsh

I am apart of the Theta Kappa Pi sorority at Lewis University. Our philanthropy is "women against domestic violence." As a group, we work closely with Guardian Angel Services located in Joliet, IL. This is a shelter for women and their children who need to get out of an abusive relationship and find a place to stay while they figure out their next steps. Guardian Angel has a 24 hour hotline that is always available for anyone to call if they need help or advice. Social workers that work at Guardian Angel also make hospital calls and go when someone has been submitted to a nearby hospital as a result of a domestic dispute. This is shelter is not a permanent

solution for these women and children, but a type of safe haven while they decide what to do next.

As a sorority, we go over every so often and make dinner for the residents. It is a great way for them to have a meal cooked for them as well as a smiling face to help them through this hard time. We don't ask the women about their situation unless they bring it up, and we just try to get to know them as a person. The little kids are always so fun to be with because they show their mothers and us unconditional love. We also play games or color with the kids so we give the moms a little break and time to

themselves if needed. Thetas also dedicate a whole week in February, called V-Day week, where we put on domestic violence awareness events everyday of the week. At the end of the week, we have a benefit where we raise money that all goes to Guardian Angel. At the end of the week, we usually have a check for around \$1,000 that we donate to Guardian Angel Services and all that they do.

Places like Guardian Angel are important to empower women who are victims and show that they have the love and

support of the community. It is not their fault and still deserve to be treated like a human, with respect and dignity. We are all children of God and need to show the love and care that he gives to us all. Going through an abusive relationship hurts your soul and may blur your vision of God. However, services like Guardian Angel are an amazing way to show someone the light that might have been shaded. I respect the men and women that dedicate their lives to helping people in need and I hope to be able to dedicate my life to the same.



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THE VISITATION

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In this issue:

- *How do we make room at the Inn?*
- *Pope Francis' visit to the United States*
- *Lewis Student Reflections*

The conversion of St. Paul

by Theresa Marten

Feast- January 25th

The feast of the conversion of St. Paul, is a celebration of a man who helped spread and form the Church. This dramatic story of transformation reminds all of us how God can use even the most unlikely instruments to deliver his redeeming message.

Originally named Saul, he was a Jew born in Tarsus giving him the privilege of being a Roman citizen. Throughout life, Saul was scrupulous in interpreting the law, even embracing the views of the Pharisees. Zealous in beliefs, Saul's fury intensified leading him to take part in the murder of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen, and to demand all Jews following Jesus in Damascus to be rounded up and arrested.

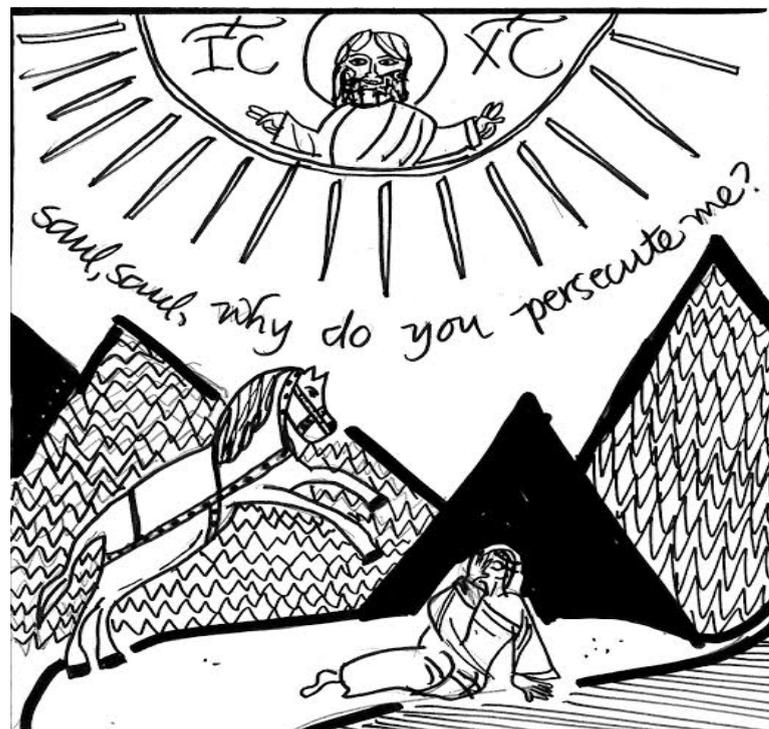
It is on the road to Damascus that this infamous conversion takes place. Struck by a great light, Saul and those who were with him stumbled to the ground in astonishment. It was then that Jesus directly questioned, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" As Christ revealed Himself, Saul humbly asks,

"What shall I do?" Blinded from the light, Saul continued to Damascus where he regained vision, was baptized, and began to preach in the synagogues.

Converted body and soul, Paul's encounter of true love and forgiveness in Christ, enabled him to continue to be zealous and persistent, but now with humility and an even deeper understanding of who God is and the power that he holds. Since Paul had such a radical change of heart and release of the sins from his past, he understood the profound power and necessity of redemption and grace.

St. Augustine writes in *De correptione et gratia* (On rebuke and Grace), "God co-works with all things for good; so absolutely all things, that even if any of them go astray, and turn aside from the right path, even this itself God makes to profit them for good, so that they return more humble and more instructed."

This truth applies to Paul and all of us. Despite our past actions, we are called to a radical conversion of self. Paul



was eventually called to convert Gentiles, but only after he did exactly what he was going to ask of each person. Paul may not have been one of the twelve apostles, but he encountered Christ's humbling voice, arm of justice and hand of mercy. His conversion did not stay on that road to Damascus, Paul constantly worked and struggled for his beliefs for the rest of his life.

I admire the total conversion of the man whom we celebrate today. Through his persistence, and honesty of his past, he influenced so many. In speaking

about himself, he preached "I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

These words are certainly worth remembering as we continue to seek a personal conversion.

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