



# THE VISITATION

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## Repent and Rely on the Gospel

by Venus Wozniak

*Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1431

*Repent and rely on the Gospel.*

That was the charge given as ashes were placed on my head this Ash Wednesday.

Each year our Church instructs us to spend forty days turning our hearts, again, in the direction of God. We are called to emulate Jesus' forty days in the desert of prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting are some of the best ways to enter into a season of repentance. This season implies that we indeed do have sin to turn from and that we are in need of continual conversion. In the days leading up to Lent I always find myself in a quandary, *what will giving up coffee actually do for my soul? How can I use this Lent to grow closer to God and farther from sin? Coffee? Carbs?*

*Snacks?*

There definitely is goodness and grace from fasting from seemingly simple pleasures. There is a both/and situation here. We are called to take these moments of fasting, especially when temptation is strongest, and cry out to our God for help. It is a reminder that we need divine intervention even with the seemingly simple things. And there is an invitation to go a step or too deeper as well. The practice of relying on God for divine intervention when seeking abstinence from the seemingly simple gives us a foundation of tools - excavation tools. Bono, of the Irish Rock Band, U2, proclaims in the 2000 rock ballad, *Elevation*: "like a mole, living in a hole, digging up my soul/going down, excavation."

Interior repentance begins with the seemingly simple. As we continue the work, we dig and dig, *excavate*. The goal is for the pick ax to move smoothly through the loam of the soul. But sometimes pebbles are discovered and must be sifted out. The pebbles of small sins - white lies, back-biting talk, gossiping, selfishness - if not filtered become hardened and sedimentary rocks are formed. These rocks are the deadly sins: pride and self aggrandizement; anger that leads to a hardened heart and denial of forgiveness; uncontrolled sexual desires that cause us to become

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*Pen and ink drawing by Leslie Colonna, artist and professor of art at Lewis University, Romeoville, IL.*

## A New Work of Mercy: Caring for Our Common Home

by Julie Laudick Dougherty

*"The love for God and neighbor was the characteristic of the first Christians. This love was expressed through the daily practice of the Works of Mercy. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to instruct the ignorant at a personal sacrifice." -Peter Maurin, Easy Essays*

In 2016, a year after publishing *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis announced something that is not as widely known but I believe might have an even deeper impact on the history of the Catholic Church. He proposed "care for our common home," or integral ecology, as a new Work of Mercy. This blew my mind! In the middle of what seemed like an ordinary

speech, the Pope introduced substantial addition to Catholic theology, which typically changes at a glacially slow pace.

For those that are not familiar with the Works of Mercy, the Catholic tradition has taught seven spiritual and seven corporeal (or bodily) works of mercy for hundreds of years. They were first enumerated as sets by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, but they are all based on the Bible. The Corporal Works of Mercy come mostly from the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in the Gospel of Matthew. The Spiritual Works of Mercy come from various passages in the

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## Letter from the Directors

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Dear Friends of Nativity House,

After an acute cold snap in January we are thankful for an early warmup.

Our most recent guest mom and her baby moved out at the end of January to a new life in the area. This baby ended up being the oldest ever in residence at Nativity House, and having a little one walking around, interacting with the adults and animals in the house was a lot of fun.

The need for housing in our area is still severe. Since our recent move-out went right on schedule, we have already started the intake process for our next mom. We are experiencing a demand for emergency placements that we have never seen in almost 10 years of operation.

The goats have emerged from the frost as rambunctious as ever. We are expecting two litters this year, with the possibility of more in future years.

Over the winter we received visitors from Oxbow Farm, an exciting new project in Maryland. This kind of exchange of ideas and practices is critical to the future of organizations that can respond to social challenges with creativity and know-how. Krista, our resident intern here, then made a visit to their farm in turn to get a better sense of how other community farms operate.

We hosted two roundtables over the winter, each led by a local university professor. These were a fun opportunity to gather for a potluck meal and discuss important topics.

Nativity House is grateful to everyone that helps out or makes our work possible. We look forward to seeing you outside as we begin a new year of planting and harvesting!

Justin & Venus Wozniak

## *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 Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

[newspaper@nativity-house.org](mailto:newspaper@nativity-house.org)

Past issues are online at:

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

## *About Nativity House*

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. 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.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House  
17141 W. 143rd St.  
Lockport, IL 60441

Donations may be made at [paypal.me/nativityhouse](https://paypal.me/nativityhouse)

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

## Repent and Rely on the Gospel

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slaves to ourselves; being painfully resentful of others good fortune; irrational desire for more than we need; excessive indulgence in food, drink or other “self-care.”

Sometimes, the pick ax hits large, unmovable boulders. These sins that began as pebbles, after months, years, even decades of neglecting the soil of our souls, compound and compress creating gigantic obstacles to grace and mercy. At times we even bask in the shade of others’ boulders; our discernment is clouded by their rousing and charismatic leadership. We follow these leaders down deeper into caverns of social sin.

### *Rely on the Gospel.*

This is why, in the infinite wisdom of our Church, following the example of Jesus, we are called into these 40 days of intense interior repentance. It is then that we must fall back on the tools from early in the process that led to the realization of the need of divine intervention. A boulder so large, found compacted in the soul, seemingly unmovable -social sin- can only be cracked and removed by full reliance on God at the grassroots level: subsidiarity in the spiritual life. The end result is *elevation* to the highest heights - heaven, perfect unity with our Creator.

During the first week of Lent we have been hearing about Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah was asked to travel to Nineveh to proclaim: *Repentance!* Jonah did not want to go to this violent and lawless city, so much so that he went as far west as he could. God, upset at Jonah’s disobedience, has a whale

swallow him up. Jonah spends 3 days in the belly of that whale. After miraculously escaping from the tomb-like belly, he obediently travels to Nineveh to deliver God’s message. The Ninevites, upon hearing the warning of complete annihilation heed the warning and everyone - child, adult, young and old - put on sackcloth and ashes and mourn their evil ways and seek the ways of God! Jonah is even brought to the King. When confronted with the evil ways of violence and lawlessness, the king too repents and dons the mark of repentance: sackcloth and ashes. And so, God has mercy on the entire city.

Nineveh, during this time, was a bustling metropolis of over 120,000 people. It was the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom, a kingdom that caused much difficulty for the Israelites. This is one of the reasons Jonah was so hesitant to carry any good news in their mere direction. There is a rather remarkable moral here. Mercy and forgiveness, the attributes of our God, apply to even the most horrid enemies, warlords, and colonizers. The humility of their king is also notable. Good News can even have an effect on an entire kingdom. The ironic twist is the anger that the prophet Jonah harbors at God’s act of mercy and forgiveness for a known enemy.

### *Repent.*

This call of Lent is not easy. Repentance - excavation - is hard and gritty work. It requires honesty and trust. We must be honest with ourselves, with those whom our sin has adversely affected, and with our God. Trusting ourselves and God that

the hard, gritty work of repentance is actually grace-filled. I wonder about the citizens of Nineveh. They were citizens of a kingdom at the top of the food chain. When Jonah named the sins of their kingdom they were quick to repent. God knew the status of their hearts; God knew their hearts were capable of repentance and they were indeed worthy of redemption.

I remember the day in fifth grade that we started the unit on the Civil War. In my 11 year old heart and mind, I was eager to delve into what I understood as the most righteous fight for justice: an end to slavery. As Mrs. Hardin explained the Mason Dixon line, the North, and the South, I eagerly flipped to the pages in my textbook to the map of which states were on which side of the fight. My heart sank. I could feel my cheeks grow hot and inflamed. Texas. We were on the wrong side of the fight.

I didn’t have the theological or catechetical words to explain what I had stumbled upon. But I understood that my country, my state, my ancestors, made a decision to fight for the right to own another human. As an adult, in the pursuit to understand the social sin of racism, I have come to understand how the legacy of slavery lives on through financial redlining, the justice and incarceration system, education systems and our military.

In the early days of Nativity House, we were in hot pursuit of a house and land to start the work. We found a nice house very close to our parish. It had a big enough yard where we could start a community garden and plenty of

bedrooms so we could offer hospitality to expectant mothers. The day that we had our board out to view the property before we signed the lease, the neighbor was out in the yard. It was a friend from our parish! Our parish pastor was supportive of our Catholic Worker hopes and dreams and of serving expectant mothers. In my naivete I was excited at the prospect of living across the street from a new parish friend. *Of course all members of our parish are supporters of pro-life endeavors!*

The next morning at Sunday Mass, this friend greeted me with apprehension. “Venus, is it true that you will be opening a house for unwed mothers across the street from my house?” I responded enthusiastically, “Yes!” and began to tell her all about the mission and vision of Nativity House. She interrupted me. “You can’t do that in my neighborhood. It’s not safe. We don’t have fences. They are going to be running through our backyards.” Crestfallen and defiant, I retorted, “Did you run much when you were pregnant? This important work! 3 out of 4 women are vulnerable to abortion because they don’t have stable housing! This is something we can do. If we don’t do it, who will?” She replied, “This is not our work. This is work for community centers. This will not happen in my backyard. I will rally the neighbors. We will shut you down. It won’t happen.”

Around the time that our country was in the midst of a mad outcry at the discovery of family separation and inhumane

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## Roundtable Roundup

by Krista Starasinich

This winter, Nativity House had the pleasure of hosting members of the community for a series of two Roundtable discussions. We hold these roundtables with the hope of fostering greater clarification of thought surrounding various topics. Each night began with a potluck dinner sharing a warm and comforting meal together before gathering in the living room for the discussion. We end each evening in the best way; praying Evening Prayer with the community.

On Saturday, February 3rd, we were joined by Dr. Peter Huff, who led our conversation on the night's topic: Merton & King. Dr. Peter Huff is Chief Mission Officer, Professor of Theology, and Director of the Sister Judith Heble Center for Benedictine Values at Benedictine University in Lisle, IL. The discussion began as we pondered the question: What was the relationship between Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King Jr? Although they had never met, they knew of each other and one could only imagine their interaction. We talked about the Civil Rights Movement and its connectedness to the anti-war movement, what it was like when King came to Chicago, and Merton's last speech and death. Personal reflections were shared on racism, the civil rights movement, and antiwar musings. It was a good and honest conversation that offered many insights for further pondering and gave segue to preparing for our next Roundtable talking about war just two weeks later.

For our second Roundtable on Friday, February 16th, we were joined by Dr. Steven Nawara to discuss the topic of War: Its Roots, Its Effects, Its Power. Dr. Steven Nawara is a Professor and the Chair of Political Science at Lewis University in Romeoville, IL. The

conversation started as we explored and shared personal thoughts on the multifaceted idea of a just war. Insight was shared on what Saints like Aquinas & Augustine had to say on the subject. As we neared the end of our time for discussion we pondered and shared thoughts on the idea of just peace.

These evenings always serve as a wonderful time of fellowship as we gather friends old and new to share a meal together and engage in intentional conversation surrounding important topics. As we ended the night of our second roundtable with Evening Prayer, I was struck by the scripture we read from Romans: "Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all." (Romans 12:12-18) I felt that these sacred words really embodied the spirit of how to approach conversation with others in true roundtable fashion and something deeper to ponder specifically related to the topics we discussed. Peace begins with our own actions, in our own hearts.



*Krista Starasinich is a live-in intern at Nativity House. She loves spending time with community, enjoys exploring new places in nature, and finding joy in all the little things in life.*



*Nativity House Community at Roundtable on February 3rd.*

## A Thank You From Our Guest Mom

Dear Nativity House,

I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt appreciation for the incredible hospitality and warmth that you have shown me and Serita over the past year. It has truly been a remarkable experience living under your roof.

From the moment I moved in, you welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like a part of your family. Your kindness, generosity, and genuine care have made this living arrangement a memorable one. I am grateful for the countless conversations we have had, the laughter we have shared, and the support you have provided during both joyous and challenging times.

Living with you and your family has been a wonderful opportunity to create lasting memories and build meaningful connections. Your home has always been a safe haven, a place where I felt comfortable and cared for. I am glad I have grown here over the past year. I would say I am a better person than I was before coming here. I cannot express enough how grateful I am for the countless acts of kindness and the sense of belonging you have given me.

Sincerely,

Pina



*Nativity House Community having a farewell dinner and 1st birthday celebration for Pina & baby Serita.*

## Repent and Rely on the Gospel

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treatment of children at our country's border, a headline in my google news feed caught my eye: *Forced Sterilization Accusations at ICE Facility*. In September of 2020, a nurse working at Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia, (a detention center contracted by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE]) filed a formal complaint. Irwin was shut down and an investigation was ordered.

In November of 2022, the United States Senate permanent subcommittee for investigations published a 108-page report. At the Georgia facility there were 94 invasive gynecologic procedures performed that were deemed unnecessary. The report also found that the Irwin County detention center held only 4% of the women in ICE custody between 2017 and 2020. The doctor that was performing these procedures in Georgia, traveled the country - detention center to detention center. He performed 80% of these procedures nationwide. This was not an egregious practice happening in just one place. Forced sterilization of women in immigration detention centers was happening nationwide.

When I voiced my own outrage and frustration at this news, a good friend informed me: the United States has a long history of forced sterilization. Documentation of such behavior, as far as we know, began in the early twentieth century with humans who were deemed "mentally deficient," and continued on with persons of color: black, native americans,

immigrants, etc.

Racism is deeply embedded in our culture, governmental structures, and societal norms. As an adult, when investigating the roots of racism in our country, I discovered that one of the main reasons for the Revolutionary War was actually slavery. England was on a road to abolishing slavery and there was worry that it was going to trickle down to the colonies. The success of our economy was keenly akin to the use of slaves in the cotton fields. The perpetuation of racism goes back to the inception of our country. The lack of dignity allotted to our brothers and sisters of color is rooted in the notion that it is ok to own another person.

Access to abortion is hotly contested. We desire for all women to choose life for their unborn child. That woman, if she chooses death, is chastised, judged. All the while, we fail to ask the questions at the root of the problem. Why do women seek abortion in the first place? Over 80% of abortions occur because the mother of the child is in a precarious situation; whether it be housing insecurity, financial instability, physical or mental abuse - abortion is a symptom of poverty. Abortion is a quick fix. Scape-goating the woman is also a quick fix.

The mere words, *forced sterilization*, are cringe-worthy. There is something in our gut that churns at the notion. We know it is not ok. Yet, our nation has advocated for it and performed *unnecessary gynecological*

*Easy Essays:*

### Share Your Wealth

by Peter Maurin  
(1877-1949)

God wants us  
to be our brother's keeper.  
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.  
What we give to the poor  
for Christ's sake  
is what we carry with us  
when we die.

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
say:

"When man dies  
he carries  
in his clutches hands  
only that which  
he has given away."



*procedures* for generations.

Yes, but.

Am I my culture's keeper?

Am I my government's keeper?

Am I my brother's keeper?

Pope John Paul II called for a compilation of all church social documents written in the twentieth century. In 2004, under the direction of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church was presented to Pope John Paul II. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* defines social sin:

Certain sins, moreover, constitute by their very object a direct assault on one's neighbor. Such sins in particular are known as social sins. Social sin is every sin committed against the justice due in relations between individuals, between the individual and the

community, and also between the community and the individual. (118)

Unfortunately, due to our nature, we are privy to, participate in and even cooperate with social sin: sin committed in community against humanity, just as the Ninevites did. The egregious acts in the name of expansion, homeland security, and securing global resources can be overwhelming. Realization of these evils can cause us to turn inward. We have a choice, turn inward in effort to escape the pain? Or turn inward in an act of interior repentance?

In many ways it is easier to tend to our own personal sin, tending only to sifting out the small pebbles in the excavation process. Just in the last 30 years, we have seen the effects of a culture turning more inward, more insular. The promise of our technological advances to make

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## A New Work of Mercy: Caring for Our Common Home

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New and Old Testament.

What is merciful about caring for our common home? Shouldn't our neighbors, and not the earth, be the objects of our mercy? In his September 1, 2016 address, Pope Francis explains: "*We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, schools for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for those needing counsel and forgiveness... But if we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces.*"

In the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus, "*Who is my neighbor?*" When Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan, he expanded the concept of neighbor to include anyone we might encounter, even those considered enemies. Until the last few hundred years, most people had a local sphere of influence. It was sufficient to love your immediate neighbor as yourself. But in our globalized economy, we purchase products and participate in systems that affect our brothers and sisters in the farthest reaches of the planet, most of whom we will never meet. In proposing care for our common home as a work of mercy, Pope Francis is inviting us to expand our concept of neighbor yet again.

Furthermore, Pope Francis introduced this new work of mercy as a 'complement' to the traditional sets. This word comes

from the Latin *complere*, which means to fill up, or to complete. In a sense, care for our common home is the seed-bearing fruit of the other works of mercy. The other works of mercy can't be completed without it because God's creation is the very medium through which we interact with and care for our neighbors. We cannot feed the hungry if our topsoil is eroded. We cannot give drink to the thirsty if we pollute our water. We cannot welcome the stranger if our house is in disarray. We cannot counsel the doubtful among the next generation if by our wasteful lifestyles we leave them a damaged earth less able to reflect the glory of the Creator (Romans 1:20).

Finally, Pope Francis explained that care for our common home is both corporal and spiritual in nature. Given that we started with fourteen, does this mean that we now have a total of fifteen, sixteen, or somehow still fourteen works of mercy? Regardless of how you choose to enumerate them, there are many ways to practice this new work of mercy in daily life.

Living on a farm provides abundant opportunities to practice caring for our common home as a corporeal work of mercy. Some of these include farming organically, removing invasives, planting native vegetation, providing spaces for animals and humans to thrive. We practice caring for our common home as a spiritual work of mercy when we prioritize making time for visitors to come to the farm, see the animals, work in the soil, and walk through the woods. God speaks through these

experiences.

Taking good care of our common home helps us practice the other seven corporeal works of mercy as well: *We feed the hungry* by donating and offering produce on a sliding scale. *We give drink to the thirsty* by using aquatic plants to filter the water that runs through our pond and into our streams. *We clothe the naked* by keeping a collection of shoes and coats in the mudroom available for volunteers and other visitors who didn't dress for the weather. *We harbor the homeless* whenever we can by hosting people who are unemployed or trying to take a break from "normal" life. *We visit the sick* by providing healing work opportunities for those with mental health issues. *We ransom the captives* who feel trapped and overworked by stressful jobs. *We bury the dead* whenever an animal dies on our farm, or we encounter a dead bird or rodent, we bury it and say the Saint Francis prayer.

As for spiritual works, we *instruct the ignorant* by leading educational farm tours. We *counsel the doubtful* by living out the best example we can of Christian life for our volunteers and visitors. We *comfort the sorrowful* by sharing our own joys and sorrows with our guests. We *reprove sinners* as gently as possible when problems within our community arise, acknowledging that we are all sinners. We *forgive injuries* when people make mistakes. We *bear with those who trouble and annoy us* when we welcome people who are struggling with life and can't always be their best selves. And we *pray for all* when we practice

ten minutes of silent prayer each morning.

Something wonderful about the works of mercy is that they inspire such simple and tangible ways to live out our faith. Everyone is called to practice them. In his most recent letter, *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis reminds us again to consider the urgency of the ecological crisis that our planet is facing. He calls out the fact that people around the world, and especially people of faith, have not made enough progress since his publication of *Laudato Si* in 2015. Even though dramatic global political responses outside of our control are ultimately needed to mitigate climate change, he notes: "there are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturing of lifestyles and convictions within societies, and there are no cultural changes without personal changes" (LD 70). We have the potential to create this culture new in small but beautiful ways, practicing the works of mercy by caring for our common home.



*Julie Laudick Dougherty runs Oxbow Farm, a Catholic Worker inspired farm in Parkton, MD along with her husband, John, who is a professor of Economics at Loyola University. The farm offers a CSA produce subscription on a sliding scale and provides fresh food access in a food desert through the Govans Farmers Market. They also offer hospitality and ecological education to a variety of short-term and long-term guests and volunteers.*

## Repent and Rely on the Gospel

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the world smaller, to make human connection broader through social media has actually thickened the layers of scales over our eyes. Media outlets scream and shout at us: the latest facial care fad, a fancy new trendy diet, and let us not forget the 5 easy steps to self actualization. Political groups, religious groups, extremist groups offer neat and tidy boxes for us to enclose ourselves in giving us platforms of belonging in which to judge others from. All of this is under the guise of building the better self. Self. Superficial Self. We have found a large boulder in the excavation process and it is compacted, compounded, solid like cement.

This tool of media holds up a mirror for us, offering reflections of self. It is a different kind of pick ax. There is a promise of relationship and connection that is actually distorted and disordered. We are formed by the platform, world view, or advertising firm we click on most. What we are longing for - meaning, longing, true self - is actually further down the rabbit hole the more we click, click, click. We have such a strong desire to think well of ourselves. We seek out unreliable realms that feed this need. There is a collective amnesia to the worth and value in which we were created.

### *Rely on the Gospel*

Pope John Paul II, a man who was directly affected by the largest social sin to date, later in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church calls for conversion through solidarity. Solidarity is the teaching of our faith that invites us into the

perspective of others. For many, solidarity starts with an honest desire to know Jesus. Jesus challenged his disciples with the parable of the sheep and goats. He challenges us too.

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’...And he will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25: 37-40)

Jesus is inviting us to relationship with him in a very specific way. He is asking us to get to know him through the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the naked. Jesus is calling us into relationship, connection, and community.

Our true self is made for community and connection. It is in our very DNA the same way that original sin is. Being made in the image and likeness of God has us continually seeking out connection and community: Good News. The forty day practice of Lent is a way to focus on our true identity, grow closer to our Creator, and forge a path to *elevation*. We can rely on the hard and gritty work of relying on God to show us the pebbles, rocks, and boulders. Engaging in the work of repentance with an honest turning inward in an effort for *radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart* will definitely open us up to Jesus’ second beatitude *blessed are those who mourn*.

Maybe this *mourning* is an act of prayer that will lead us to prayerful and righteous action. We can ask for renewed trust in the Gospel promise of eventual and eternal elevation.



*Venus Wozniak is the co-founder of Nativity House. She also serves the Lewis University community as Associate Director of Mission & Ministry.*

## St. Bernadette Soubirous

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35 on April 17, 1879, in Nevers, France.

The beatification of Bernadette was June 14th, 1925, and she was canonized a Saint on December 8th, 1933. St. Bernadette is the patron saint of Lourdes, France and illness, shepherds, shepheresses, poverty, and people ridiculed for their faith. Her feast day is April 16th. Lourdes, France remains one of the most significant pilgrimage sites in the world, thanks to Bernadette.



*Kate Curtis is a community manager for Sacred Tent- a Catholic Worker Community.*

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Nativity House  
17141 W. 143rd St.  
Lockport, IL 60441



## St. Bernadette Soubirous

Born: January 7th, 1844

Died: April 16th, 1879

Feast Day: April 16th

Patron of illness, people ridiculed for their piety, poverty, shepherds, shepherdesses, and Lourdes, France

by Kate Curtis

Lourdes has always piqued my curiosity. Being someone who received her first communion on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes (February 11th), in addition to frequenting the Our Lady of Lourdes grotto in Chicago, I love learning about the history of one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the world: Lourdes, France; along with the foundress of the Church next to the grotto, St. Bernadette.

Born to a poor family on January 7th, 1844, in Lourdes, France, Bernadette Soubirous was the eldest of nine children. Around the age of 10, Bernadette contracted cholera and developed subsequent health issues because of the disease. She remained frail in health during most of her lifetime.

On February 11th, 1858, Bernadette and her sister were collecting wood. While near a

grotto with rose bushes, Bernadette experienced a vision of the Holy Mother. At the time, she claimed this mystical figure wore blue and white and was holding a rosary while also making the sign of the cross. This would be the first apparition of eighteen.

About a week after, the Holy Mother again asked Bernadette to return to the grotto every day for a fortnight (a period of two weeks) – the apparitions continued. Bernadette's visions of Mary became known as holy fortnight. During one of her visits to the grotto, she claimed Mary told her to drink the water of the spring as an act of penance. It was the following day the grotto's muddy water had cleared to fresh clean water. "I am the Immaculate Conception," was spoken to Bernadette during an apparition of Mary.

For those who are unfamiliar with



St. Bernadette  
circa 1861, age 17

apparitions, they are typically ghost like images/visions. The Catholic Church recognizes Marian apparitions – that is, that the Holy Mother cares for the Church and it is possible she appears to people. The Church has a formal process for validating an apparition, just like they do when verifying a miracle that might be considered in someone's beatification/canonization process.

If some are wondering if towns people questioned Bernadette and her apparitions, they did. Some believed she should be put in an infirmary, and she was thoroughly questioned by a government committee and a Church committee. Their conclusions

were that she was telling the truth. Over time, there were 80 cures of illnesses of people who visited the grotto, and these medical cures were verified by Lourdes Medical Bureau after vigorous medical evaluations and it was concluded, medically, that there was no explanation for the cures.

Because of the popularity of the grotto and the Church that was built by it, Bernadette joined the Nevers, and became a nun. Once she left Lourdes, she never returned. Her health remained bad, and she considered her work in Lourdes finished. She continued to care for the sick until her untimely death at the age of

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