

2015

TOGETHER SHARING CHRIST LENT

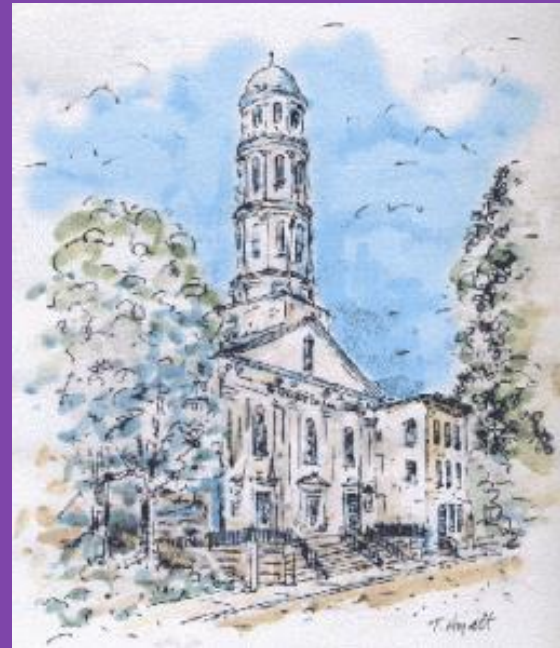
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We prepare for Easter with our Lenten theme: this is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.

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- Understanding the Sacrament of Penance
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WWW.STVCHURCH.ORG

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VOLUME 35, NUMBER 3

Letter from the Pastor

March 2015

Shalom!

We are almost halfway through Lent already, and the frozen grip of the coldest winter in a long time seems finally to be loosening. Could it be that we will actually have spring again, and with it, Easter?

Wouldn't that be a surprise? In a way, yes. We've been cold for so long that the idea of being warm again will seem a little strange, even surprising. But in a deeper sense, no. We've known all along that every winter is followed by a spring, and that every Lent brings another celebration of Easter.

So what is a surprise? If the Easter Bunny finds a full-pound size chocolate Easter egg for your Easter basket, would that be a surprise? Sort of. I don't think I've ever seen a whole-pound egg. Have you? So a 1 lb. egg would be a surprise for us but not a big surprise. Given that we all know that the Bunny brings chocolate eggs, even big ones, like half-pounders, would it even qualify a real surprise to find a 1 lb. chocolate egg in your basket?

So what is a real surprise, really? Something we would not have expected at all, maybe? Something that turned our idea of reality on its head?

Why am I playing games around the word "surprise?" Because Pope Francis recently said that we should be "open and surprised by God." As our Outreach and Evangelization team batted that statement around, we came to realize that this brief little remark was a koan, an enigma, a parable that could help open up for us the question of evangelization, the spreading of "God's good news," as Mark puts it.

So we are putting the quote up on a banner on the back (West) wall of the Church, and we will reproduce that banner in smaller scale for refrigerators and car bumpers (more info on this very soon). This letter is just a heads-up on this development.

Think about it. In what ways has God really been a surprise for you in the past? What surprises do you think God might be capable of in the future? Note that this kind of thinking involves us in a paradox: if we can really predict it, it's not really a surprise, but if we don't expect it at least enough to be open to its coming, we may miss it entirely. If God is the source of the openness and surprise of the natural world, as Beth Johnson is telling us in *Ask the Beasts*, what kind of surprise is God capable of being for us? How open are we? These are Meditation topics as Easter draws nigh.

Peace and Love,

Dick

Pastor

LETTER FROM THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL PARISH COUNCIL

JANUARY 2015

Dear Parishioners,

Last October, I suggested that we not keep our way of being church under a basket and I encouraged all of us to consider family, friends, or co-workers who struggle for meaning and purpose, who may be disillusioned or rudderless and invite them to give St V a try. Nothing heavy-handed, just a well-timed nudge, with a “come and see” approach. Pope Francis has prompted a lot of interest, a lot of re-thinking. People seem to be deeply attracted to the church he envisions, one of mercy and forgiveness. It’s been the church we envision, too, and one we have been trying to live. I pointed out that it’s only Good News if it’s shared.

During November and December, hundreds of parishioners met in geographic clusters to discuss bringing this Good News to others. We heard that many did not know how to overcome the discomfort of sharing personal faith journeys.

The *Education and Enrichment* Committee has chosen a book to help each parishioner become an ambassador for our community, our Church, our Christianity. If you cannot join a regional discussion group this Lent, pick up your own copy of the book, *Life on Mission* by Tim Harlow.

It is hoped that we all can become articulate in sharing our encounter with the Living God when the opportunities that life offers present themselves. Many people are hungry and searching and cross our paths daily.

Frank DeSaino and Kenneth Boyack in their book *Creating the Evangelizing Parish* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1993) discuss our Catholic perception:

Very few parishes and parishioners can even accept evangelization’s basic ideas and fewer still are evangelizing. For most parishioners, faith is a totally self-centered activity. Most parishes are designed to take care of their own members. (Evangelizing)Teams might well be the simplest way to keep a parish honest about its full mission. Their function is to make it possible for the whole parish to evangelize effectively.

Finally, the former Communications and Outreach Committee has proposed to the Parish Council that the central parish staff be responsible for all parish communication; and that the committee’s mission and name be changed to *Outreach and Engagement*. This new committee will become the Evangelizing Team for the parish. Check out the website for their mission charter: <http://www.stvchurch.org/council-committees/outreach-engagement/>

Keep us in your prayers.

Peace and blessings,

Audrey Rogers for the Parish Council

LENT AT ST. VINCENT

“This is the Time of Fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

This is our Lenten Theme, our rally cry. Our faith journey must be more than a self-centered activity. Christianity was never intended to be simply a religion of the book, an intellectual exercise or a private affair. The good news of Jesus Christ is not so much what happens to us but what must be done by us. **Being Catholic needs to be about what we do, and how we act.** If we call ourselves Catholic, we declare that we are about encountering the other, opening our heart in relationship, healing the wounded of the world and making everything whole and blessed. Being Catholic is the way our love gives birth to God.

Every Sunday during Lent we pray our *Prayer of Discipleship*. Join us in this journey of prayer through Lent and Easter.

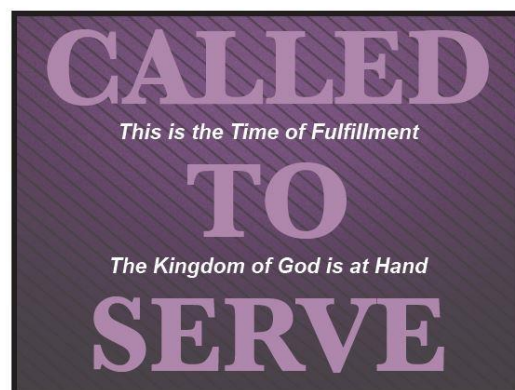
Eternal God, Holy Mystery, Mother and Father of us all, I thank you for choosing me to be your disciple and for the gift of your Son, Jesus.

Help me proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel by word and by deed today and every day.

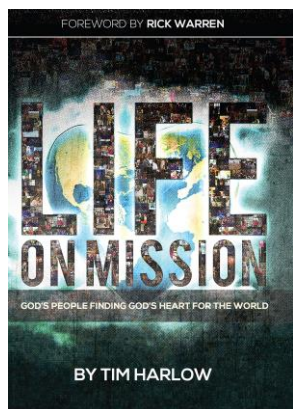
Open my heart to the outcast, the forgotten, the lonely, the sick and the poor.

Grant me the courage to think, to choose and to live as your servant, joyfully obedient to God.

Amen



Our Lenten Book Discussion: Life on Mission



This year the Education and Enrichment Committee chose as our reading for Lent *Life on Mission: God's People Finding God's Heart for the World* by Evangelical pastor Tim Harlow. Most of us who know and follow Jesus *want* to share our faith. Yet when it comes to actually doing it, we get intimidated. Sharing our faith should be natural, easy—but it isn't always. This book provides the skills to respond to the hurting and hungry people we know, showing us how to connect with and serve others in a way that opens their hearts to the Gospel. People who matter to God are all around us, and God has given us the incredible assignment of inviting them to come home. *Life on Mission* will inspire and equip us to do that.

See the back page of this issue for a list of our liturgies for Holy Week.

POPE FRANCIS'S NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION LIST

BY CINDY WOODEN

VATICAN CITY — When Pope Francis met before Christmas with Vatican employees, mostly lay people with families, he asked them to do 10 things. The list sounded remarkably like suggestions for New Year's resolutions:

- “Take care of your spiritual life, your relationship with God, because this is the backbone of everything we do and everything we are.”
- “Take care of your family life, giving your children and loved ones not just money, but most of all your time, attention and love.”
- “Take care of your relationships with others, transforming your faith into life and your words into good works, especially on behalf of the needy.”
- “Be careful how you speak, purify your tongue of offensive words, vulgarity and worldly decadence.”
- “Heal wounds of the heart with the oil of forgiveness, forgiving those who have hurt us and medicating the wounds we have caused others.”
- “Look after your work, doing it with enthusiasm, humility, competence, passion and with a spirit that knows how to thank the Lord.”
- “Be careful of envy, lust, hatred and negative feelings that devour our interior peace and transform us into destroyed and destructive people.”
- “Watch out for anger that can lead to vengeance; for laziness that leads to existential euthanasia; for pointing the finger at others, which leads to pride; and for complaining continually, which leads to desperation.”
- “Take care of brothers and sisters who are weaker ... the elderly, the sick, the hungry, the homeless and strangers, because we will be judged on this.”

UPDATE because we initially didn't include No. 10:

- Making sure your Christmas is about Jesus and not about shopping.



CNS/Paul Haring

WHY THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE?

WHY A COMMUNAL PENANCE SERVICE?

BY ANNE MAURA ENGLISH

Some questions concerning the communal service could be: “What’s the point of going if I’m not going to individual confession? . . . If I want to go to individual confession why not just do that—why take the extra time to go to the Communal Penance Service? . . . I go to confession fairly regularly with a priest who’s been very helpful to me but he won’t be at the tri-church service; why should I go? . . . I don’t get the point of the sacrament of Penance in any form: individual or communal.”

There’s no question that over the last 50 years, participation in the sacrament of Penance has substantially decreased. The above questions summarize some of the confusion contributing to that. More directly, the decline seems grounded in a dramatic shift in the Catholic understanding of sin. For those Catholics who grew up in the early part of the 20th century, sin often seemed to dominate the approach to God and faith. To be a sinner meant having a list of concrete actions that one had taken. Many of those actions were “venial” sins but “mortal sin” was fairly easy to commit (missing Mass, eating meat on Friday, letting the communion host touch our teeth and a seeming multitude of infractions that came with puberty) and those could separate one completely from God and merit going to hell if the person died before getting to Confession. In that context, Confession was frequently experienced as both emancipation and protection from the demands of an often-angry Judge.

Then the Church rediscovered that “God is Love.” And theologians began to seriously question whether one could jump in and out of a committed relationship with God as nimbly as Catholicism (and particularly its sex education) seemed to imply. But despite theological work that has been done on analyzing what “sin” means, we as a faith people continue to struggle for a contemporary understanding of sin which avoids that guilt-ridden landscape of the past but can genuinely speak to the reality of our lives. For many of us who grew up in the post-sin-drenched era that has meant teaching about sin was either avoided or was presented without any particular relevance to *our* lives. It is hardly surprising then that we still seem to be fumbling our way to a renewed theology of the Sacrament of Penance. Consequently it often seems to have stayed grounded in that prior attitude toward sin and God which we have largely abandoned in all other aspects of our spirituality.

But fundamental changes in our understanding of the sacrament and in the way we do the ritual are possible. It’s certainly happened before. In fact, if you want proof that the Catholic Church can change, you don’t have to look any farther than the history of the Sacrament of Penance! (A thorough history of that is more than this essay can handle, but some of those changes will be mentioned later on.) The reminder of this article will look at some ways we can make the sacrament (in both its individual and communal incarnations) more meaningful, but it doesn’t pretend to have come up with what a truly renewed ritual would look like.

Two basic insights seem particularly important as a beginning. First? This is a sacrament so it’s supposed to be *celebrated*! Seeing it just as an opportunity for beating our breast and feeling awful is just plain wrong. This sacrament is supposed to be a cause for joy. Why? Because like all sacraments it is an encounter with a wonderful God. We don’t have to go it alone. If Christ is right that he is the vine and we the branches, we have a God who gets as excited about our putting forth shoots on our vine as a flower show enthusiast gets when their prize rosebush



blossoms. We have a God who is intimately aware of our desire to live our faith more fully, Who invites and empowers us forward inch by inch, and Who never, ever gives up on us.

Who is there like You, the God who removes guilt . . . but delights in clemency, . . . treading underfoot our guilt. You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins. *Micah 7*

I have brushed away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like a mist. *Isaiah 44*

Second is the realization that the basic fact about sin is that it shows something is missing. The gospel calls us “to be perfect” as our heavenly Abba is perfect, to “have life and have it in full abundance, in a new dimension.” (Jn 10). We are meant to be branches of the vine that is Christ. The gospel is filled with exhortations from and multiple modellings by Jesus of what that might mean. Surely no rational Christian would claim that she or he is there yet. Entering into the sacrament—in whatever form—a few times a year keeps that call from slipping between the cracks of our busy lives. But from this perspective, our pre-sacrament preparation should be not just a “fearless inventory” but an “awesome” one as well. Perhaps the first questions should be, “Where have I grown since my last Sacrament of Penance?” “Through what experiences, people, events, insights has God reached out to strengthen and heal me?” “How am I able now to enter more fully into my conversion to wHoliness?”

Because this is a sacrament—and all sacraments are *community* events—participation in this sacrament also calls us to remember—our American fixation with self-help and bootstrap progress notwithstanding—that we need God’s help and the help of each other if we are to continue that process of conversion.

BUT WHY COMMUNAL Penance?



We talk a lot about “community” in Christianity. We all long for that. Some of us have been lucky enough to experience that in a work place, among college or team peers, in a neighborhood. We cherish both the fun times and the times of support in grief or crisis. We strive to make our parish one of those communities.

A *communal* penance service challenges us to go deeper. The fun, the support, the socializing are crucial but to be a *Christian* community means also to see and accept ourselves as a community of “sinners,” of those who are still striving to *be* Christian. We stand together “naked” as it were—aware and accepting of “warts and all,” pledging by our presence that we will offer both healing and challenge to each other—both to those to whom we are naturally drawn and to those who drive us nuts or annoy us to no end, to those with whom we resonate and to those with whom we could not disagree more.

A *communal* penance service reminds us that we are the “body” of Christ. There can be no such thing as a private, personal sin; each one’s failings effect the entire community. It can be a surprise to learn that in the early centuries of this sacrament, there was no sense that it was about experiencing God’s forgiveness. The sacrament was reserved for Christians who had committed major sins: murder, adultery, apostasy—public failings that had brought scandal and scorn on the community as a whole from the Jewish or pagan peoples surrounding them. Christian sinners did drastic, public penance anywhere from a few months to the rest of one’s life (depending on the geographic location—no “Vatican policy” yet) to demonstrate their remorse for betraying their fellow Christians. Receiving the sacrament ending that penance was a reconciliation with and re-welcoming back into the community.

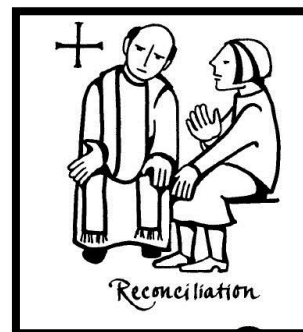
A *communal* penance service re-commits each person to be Christ to each other: accepting, supporting, inspiring, empowering each other to grow. A *communal* penance service can be an opportunity to reflect on ways in which the community has done that for me.

A *communal* penance service—separate from the need to tabulate “how many times”—can help me to reflect on sin as *sinfulness*, as the pervasive “unfinishedness” that is also a reality of my life. (If I did x, y, and z, a certain number of times since my last confession, does that mean that in-between those acts I was not a sinner?) Perhaps the familiar act of being with others can challenge me to look at those other areas of my life that hold me back from growing as a Christian. Many of them have to do with my life as a social being. Maybe I’m a workaholic. Maybe personality-wise I have a tendency to be cynical or grumpy. Maybe I have trust issues. Maybe I waste a lot of time and so don’t get to truly important things. Maybe I wouldn’t be so irritable if I got more sleep, ate a healthier diet, or got some exercise. If I take any of those to private confession, chances are good I’m going to be told, “That’s not a sin.” But here in this quiet church, in the midst of other real people just like the ones who are impacted by my personal, psychological failings, perhaps I can see that what is really impeding my spiritual journey is not my laundry list that qualifies as “sin” but these. And bringing that awareness to prayer is itself a grace.

For us, first world Americans, a *communal* penance service lets us recognize that we are implicated in the social injustice of our planet. We come in our helplessness, knowing that our privileged life style is often built on the poverty and desperation of others—and that our best efforts to do something—while important—are ultimately inadequate. We acknowledge that overwhelming evil—the reality of sin chronicled on the front pages of our newspapers—is beyond our ability to heal or fix, so we come to open our world to God’s healing.

WHY PRIVATE CONFESSION?

Private confession was never meant to lose all touch with the communal dimension. The confessor was supposed to represent the community and the communal dimensions discussed above. Nevertheless, when the Irish monks introduced the shocking innovation of private confession in the early Middle Ages, it encountered decades and decades of condemnation and outright banning from Rome. It survived despite concerted, determined efforts to wipe it out. Could this have happened without the Holy Spirit’s support? Does this apparent gift from the *sensus fidei*, the “sense of the faithful” be on to something that we’re overlooking?



Several years ago while visiting relatives I joined them for a Sunday service in their small, non-denominational Christian church. It was a strange combination of ex-Catholics, evangelical fundamentalists, and a fervent commitment to social justice (including openness to controversial areas). The pastor gave a thoughtful, personal sermon on the woman washing the feet of Jesus and his own need for healing. He then announced that after the communion service, he and several of the trained pastoral counselors who are part of their ministry team would be seated in the back and sides of church and anyone who wished could come talk with them about their own struggles and sin. The lines were long. We had to prolong the service with multiple additional hymns. It amused me to think that some of these folks would be horrified to know they were engaging in a pseudo-Catholic ritual!

In inviting people to participate, that pastor cited his own experience that talking about one’s struggle to live faith can be freeing and empowering. We have that as a part of our Catholic tradition. If we choose our confessor wisely, it’s just possible he can give us some practical advice to help us change. Or maybe point out that the *real* problem is something else. Can’t we all remember important advice or encouragement in every other aspect of our lives? Why not this as well?

We can believe in God’s love without Eucharist; countless believers in other faith traditions do. We can believe in God’s joyful forgiveness and the support of community without the Sacrament of Penance in either form. Why deny ourselves the full sensory experience?

SANDWICHES IN THE PARK

BY KIERAN RUPPERT

Part of my job at the church has been to get to know the folks in The Park. I have met folks staying out there who have told me stories that did not so much break my heart as just, like, rend it into a whole bunch of little pieces. Out of respect for their privacy and stories, I will not get into any specifics, but they have provided valuable lessons in appreciation for all that I have. This appreciation is not just for the material stuff I have like a heated home and access to a bathroom, but also for the value of immaterial things like a college education from some West Coast school and the dignity that comes with having a salaried, or stipended, job. Of course, having this appreciation without acting on it would just make me sound unbearably smug, so I would like to tell you about how it has influenced me...not that that will take away the smug factor.

Inextricably linked to my gratitude for all that I have is a newfound appreciation for Luke 12:48. This has led to my taking more seriously how much is required of me because of how much I have been given. In the day to day operations of my work at St. Vincent, I put this idea into practice by making sandwiches. I take the extra bread from our food pantry that would go to waste by the following Monday and make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Not most people's ideal meal, but it is something to eat.



For about seven dollars I can get enough turkey, lettuce and tomatoes at Aldi to make decent turkey sandwiches for the folks out there as well. Providing not only the food but the option is crucial to providing dignity. If someone is tired of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, they can opt for the turkey. Perhaps more important is that the option exists should anyone decide they want to be a vegetarian. If someone believes it is wrong to eat animals, lack of material wealth should not prevent them from living what they believe to be an ethical life. Whether they go for the turkey or peanut butter and jelly, providing this choice is hopefully providing folks in the park with some of the dignity they deserve.

These sandwiches are important because I was surprised to find that while there are a few places that provide a daily lunch, dinners are much sparser in Baltimore. St. Vincent is one of two parishes in Baltimore City that provide dinner on Fridays. People who eat at our Friday night dinner are not choosing between us and a dozen other organizations around the city for their next meal, they are choosing between us and waiting for Our Daily Bread which opens at noon on Saturday. After a good amount of research online and calling places around Baltimore to verify, I could not find any dinners on Monday nights. So when the food pantry has leftover bread and I make sandwiches on Monday, I am unfortunately making what could be someone's dinner.

And please do not mistake this for self-aggrandizing; I am a small part in a big machine. I could not do what little I do without the support of St. Vincent. You all go out and work hard and use part of your hard earned paycheck to donate these supplies, I just try to do something useful with what is leftover. Thanks for affording me the opportunity to feed folks in The Park.

GO GREEN!

BY LOUISE GREGG

Go Green! is neither an early St. Patty's Day slogan nor a sports team cheer. It's a call to consider our green earth, and to reuse, refurbish, renew, and recycle what we can. I've been concerned with ecology for a long time but I was not aware of all that has been done here at St. V's in terms of going green.

I'll be writing on this to help us be more mindful of this important topic. Some of you are regular recyclers at home. I salute you: Keep up the good work –Go Green!

Some of you have not decided to recycle, or are not aware of what it entails. Others may say they don't know how, or it's too much work. Maybe you are not convinced that it's even important. That's fine, but be prepared to be challenged by Pope Francis' encyclical on care of the environment due out later this year.



Meanwhile, here's something to help to challenge us during Lent: the 2015 Lenten Carbon Fast Calendar.

<http://gwipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015-IPL-Lenten-Carbon-Fast-Calendar.pdf>

It's a cool calendar with ideas about what we could do to help Mother Earth, i.e. our environment, the deteriorating climate problem, our health, our carbon footprint, our pocketbook, etc. It was developed by our regional (DC., MD., NoVA.) Interfaith Power & Light (Greater Washington Interfaith Power & Light):

<http://gwipl.org@mail.salsalabs.net>

They are part of a national group, again interfaith: <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

Also, the Nature Conservancy has a free personal and family carbon calculator:

<http://www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/>



Young Jesus at Bath Time



ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO

THE LAST SERMON (1980)

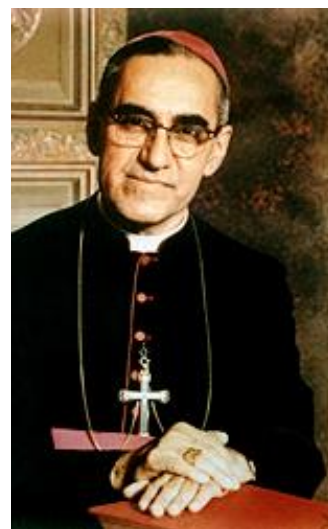
Let no one be offended because we use the divine words read at our mass to shed light on the social, political and economic situation of our people. Not to do so would be unchristian. Christ desires to unite himself with humanity, so that the light he brings from God might become life for nations and individuals.

I know many are shocked by this preaching and want to accuse us of forsaking the gospel for politics. But I reject this accusation. I am trying to bring to life the message of the Second Vatican Council and the meetings at Medellin and Puebla. The documents from these meetings should not just be studied theoretically. They should be brought to life and translated into the real struggle to preach the gospel as it should be for our people. Each week I go about the country listening to the cries of the people, their pain from so much crime, and the ignominy of so much violence. Each week I ask the Lord to give me the right words to console, to denounce, to call for repentance. And even though I may be a voice crying in the desert, I know that the Church is making the effort to fulfill its mission....

Every country lives its own "exodus"; today El Salvador is living its own exodus. Today we are passing to our liberation through a desert strewn with bodies and where anguish and pain are devastating us. Many suffer the temptation of those who walked with Moses and wanted to turn back and did not work together. It is the same old story. God, however, wants to save the people by making a new history....

History will not fail; God sustains it. That is why I say that insofar as historical projects attempt to reflect the eternal plan of God, to that extent they reflect the kingdom of God. This attempt is the work of the Church. Because of this, the Church, the people of God in history, is not attached to any one social system, to any political organization, to any party. The Church does not identify herself with any of those forces because she is the eternal pilgrim of history and is indicating at every historical moment what reflects the kingdom of God and what does not reflect the kingdom of God. She is the servant of the Kingdom of God.

The great task of Christians must be to absorb the spirit of God's kingdom and, with souls filled with the kingdom of God, to work on the projects of history. It's fine to be organized in popular groups; it's all right to form political parties; it's all right to take part in the government. It's fine as long as you are a Christian who carries the reflection of the kingdom of God and tries to establish it where you are working, and as long as you are not being used to further worldly ambitions. This is the great duty of the people of today. My dear Christians, I have always told you, and I will repeat, that the true liberators of our people must come from us Christians, from the people of God. Any historical plan that's not based on what we spoke of in the first point-the dignity of the human being, the love of God, the kingdom of Christ among people-will be a fleeting project. Your project, however, will grow in stability the more it reflects the



eternal design of God. It will be a solution of the common good of the people every time, if it meets the needs of the people.... Now I invite you to look at things through the eyes of the Church, which is trying to be the kingdom of God on earth and so often must illuminate the realities of our national situation.

We have lived through a tremendously tragic week. I could not give you the facts before, but a week ago last Saturday, on 15 March, one of the largest and most distressing military operations was carried out in the countryside. The villages affected were La Laguna, Plan de Ocotes and El Rosario. The operation brought tragedy: a lot of ranches were burned, there was looting, and-inevitably-people were killed. In La Laguna, the attackers killed a married couple, Ernesto Navas and Audelia Mejia de Navas, their little children, Martin and Hilda, thirteen and seven years old, and eleven more peasants.

Other deaths have been reported, but we do not know the names of the dead. In Plan de Ocotes, two children and four peasants were killed, including two women. In El Rosario, three more peasants were killed. That was last Saturday. Last Sunday, the following were assassinated in Arcatao by four members of ORDEN: peasants Marcelino Serrano, Vincente Ayala, twenty-four years old, and his son, Freddy. That same day, Fernando Hernandez Navarro, a peasant, was assassinated in Galera de Jutiapa, when he fled from the military. Last Monday, 17 March, was a tremendously violent day. Bombs exploded in the capital as well as in the interior of the country. The damage was very substantial at the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture. The campus of the national university was under armed siege from dawn until 7 P.M. Throughout the day, constant bursts of machine-gun fire were heard in the university area. The archbishop's office intervened to protect people who found themselves caught inside.

On the Hacienda Colima, eighteen persons died, at least fifteen of whom were peasants. The administrator and the grocer of the ranch also died. The armed forces confirmed that there was a confrontation. A film of the events appeared on TV, and many analyzed interesting aspects of the situation. At least fifty people died in serious incidents that day: in the capital, seven persons died in events at the Colonia Santa Lucia; on the outskirts of Tecmillantas, five people died; and in the area of the rubbish dump, after the evacuation of the site by the military, were found the bodies of four workers who had been captured in that action.

Sixteen peasants died in the village of Montepeque, thirty-eight kilometers along the road to Suchitoto. That same day, two students at the University of Central America were captured in Tecmillantas: Mario Nelson and Miguel Alberto Rodriguez Velado, who were brothers. The first one, after four days of illegal detention, was handed over to the courts. Not so his brother, who was wounded and is still held in illegal detention. Legal Aid is intervening on his behalf.

Amnesty International issued a press release in which it described the repression of the peasants, especially in the area of Chalatenango. The week's events confirm this report in spite of the fact the government denies it. As I entered the church, I was given a cable that says, "Amnesty International confirmed today [that was yesterday] that in El Salvador human rights are violated to extremes that have not been seen in other countries." That is what Patricio Fuentes (spokesman for the urgent action section for Central America in Swedish Amnesty International) said at a press conference in Managua, Nicaragua.

Fuentes confirmed that, during two weeks of investigations he carried out in El Salvador, he was able to establish that there had been eighty-three political assassinations between 10 and 14 March. He pointed out that Amnesty International recently condemned the government of El Salvador, alleging that it was responsible for six hundred political assassinations. The Salvadorean government defended itself against the charges, arguing that Amnesty International based its condemnation on unproved assumptions.

Fuentes said that Amnesty had established that in El Salvador human rights are violated to a worse degree than the repression in Chile after the coupe d'etat. The Salvadorean government also said that the six hundred dead were the result of armed confrontations between army troops and guerrillas. Fuentes said that during his stay in El Salvador, he could see that the victims had been tortured before their deaths and mutilated afterward.

The spokesman of Amnesty International said that the victims' bodies characteristically appeared with the thumbs tied behind their backs. Corrosive liquids had been applied to the corpses to prevent identification of the victims by their relatives and to prevent international condemnation, the spokesman added. Nevertheless, the bodies were exhumed and the dead have been identified. Fuentes said that the repression carried out by the Salvadorean army was aimed at breaking the popular organizations through the assassination of their leaders in both town and country.

According to the spokesman of Amnesty International, at least three thousand five hundred peasants have fled from their homes to the capital to escape persecution. "We have complete lists in London and Sweden of young children and women who have been assassinated for being organized," Fuentes stated....

I would like to make a special appeal to the men of the army, and specifically to the ranks of the National Guard, the police and the military. Brothers, you come from our own people. You are killing your own brother peasants when any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God which says, "Thou shalt not kill." No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you recovered your consciences and obeyed your consciences rather than a sinful order. The church, the defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such an abomination. We want the government to face the fact that reforms are valueless if they are to be carried out at the cost of so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression.

The church preaches your liberation just as we have studied it in just as we have studied it in the holy Bible today. It is a liberation that has, above all else, respect for the dignity of the person, hope for humanity's common good, and the transcendence that looks before all to God and only from God derives its hope and its strength.

From *The Church and Human Liberation*, March 14, 1980.

MOONLIGHT

Moonlight on my face
Heaven's caress awakes me
Softly brings comfort

Blessed assurance
Lightens recent days' despair
Of this world gone mad

Needed reminder
Eases me into today
Permeates my soul

Energizes me
Subtle kindnesses to do
Yes, dote on this world



POETRY

BY BARBARA BOWELS

BIRTHDAY RUMINATION

Another birthday
So, yes, I do consider
My mortality

When death comes calling
Will I have time for goodbyes
Or swiftly depart?

When death comes calling
Will I linger, suffering
Or gasp in surprise?

When life comes calling
Will I seize creative time
Or only waste it?

When life comes calling
Will I open to freshness
And gasp in surprise?

I affirm the choice
I will LIVE until I die
Soul energy wins.

MARCH SNOW

Snow falls heavily
An unwelcome intruder
Disrupting the day

Accumulating
Weighing down, muffling meaning
Shrouding shapes, colors

Winter overstay
With brittle thoughts of the past
Freeze framing events

Clinging ice cocoons
Paralyzing encasements
Grip unyieldingly

Spring's thaw brings melting
Gradually releases
Free flowing feelings

Reanimating
Relinquishing old regrets
Reclaiming true hope



JUSTICE NOT ONLY CHARITY

BY ANNE MAURA ENGLISH

This is a fourth in a series of reflections on the Catholic history of social concern. The basic theme has been that in the Catholic tradition works of concern for others are based not just on charity, that is on a feeling of empathy for those who suffer, but on justice, on a conviction of what is owed to others by virtue of their humanity. This is in harmony with the biblical understanding of justice and the reciprocal influence of justice on charity and charity on justice has undergirded Catholic Christian works of social concern through the centuries.

This article will look at justice in the theology of Thomas Aquinas (died 1274). To those born in the first half of the 20th century, Aquinas' name was almost synonymous with "theology." And there is no argument, even today, that his is one of the greatest theological minds Christianity has known. Although Thomas's works were important in theology, particularly for teachers and preachers in the Dominican Order of which he had been a member, they received a new emphasis—a rediscovery—in the 19th century, in the move to "neo-scholasticism." Their importance for today in the theme of this article is that Thomas's discussion of justice has been the mainstay and guiding principle of 20th century Catholic social teaching. It is largely because of Aquinas that Catholicism has moved into the forefront of advocacy for social justice.

When Thomas Aquinas examines the virtues, he first turns to those which are directed toward human relationship with God: faith, hope, charity. When he begins his discussion of the virtues which should govern human beings actions toward each other, however, he places justice at the top of the list. He devotes more space to his treatment of justice than he does to any other virtue. Aquinas defines justice as the "strong and firm will to give each person their due." His development of this is divided into two categories. The first, *commutative justice*, is what people most often think of when they use the word "justice." Its main focus is things. To practice commutative justice is to maintain fairness in everything having to do with giving and receiving things. If someone makes a purchase, they need to pay a fair price for it. However, the seller needs to be equally fair in setting that price.

Thomas' writing predates European capitalism as it began to evolve in the early 16th century. Many of the standards which contemporary capitalism takes for granted as "fair" would be foreign to his perspective: charging "whatever the market will bear," for instance, or buying raw materials cheap from Third World countries to make expensive First World commodities.

But Aquinas gives much greater emphasis—and treats at more length—*distributive justice*. This justice concerns persons and the common good. The relationship to the English word "distribution" is not accidental. Aquinas' analysis of this justice demands a reciprocity that looks to both the good of society as a whole and the good of each and every member of that society. He demands a genuine reciprocity here. Justice means that the individual's choices must be guided by the common good AND the community is obligated to be guided by what is good for the individual. This deliberately moves beyond commutative justice. To qualify as just—and there is no room for excuses here—actions for the common good must consider the needs of the *weakest* members of the community. Anything less is "unjust" and cannot be morally defended.

Justice takes first place in the list of virtues precisely because it subordinates every legitimate activity to the common good—but without sacrificing the good the community owes the individual. For Aquinas this just makes

secular and spiritual sense. Providing for the good of individuals strengthens each one's ability to contribute to the common good and providing for the common good strengthens society's ability to contribute to the good of individuals. Again the weakest members must always factor into this.

Although distributive justice also applies to "things," material goods, it does not stop there. Aquinas examines its relevance to "higher and cultural goods (even truth, fidelity and honor) insofar as they concern the necessary functioning of communal life." In the 1980's, moral theologian Bernard Haring used affirmative action laws as an example of what this might mean today. It would appear that Thomas might also consider the U.S. First Amendment as right on target. What might his attitude be toward a universal "right" to a quality education? In his own day, Aquinas gives practical application of the non-material aspects of distributive justice by mincing no words in his condemnation of the appointment of friends, family members, people whose support one wants to positions of power either in the state or within the church. Furthermore, "the powerful are bound to renounce all privileges, however they may have been obtained, that infringe on the basic rights and true good of the other members of the community."

Aquinas even sees distributive justice (not the commutative "eye for an eye") as the basis and rationale for legal justice. As an assault on the common good, society must be protected from criminal activity. However, in legal justice also the good of the individual must be upheld. In today's terms, Aquinas would probably understand a prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment"—although within his cultural framework his definition of what fall into that category might be different than today's—but he most likely would oppose "three strikes and you're out" sentencing or any restrictions that would prevent judges from considering individual circumstances in imposing sentence. He readily admits, however, that true justice is "never fully enforceable because the common welfare can be very much endangered by the excessive use of force."

At the time in which Aquinas wrote, of course, ordinary people had little opportunity—and thus responsibility—for ensuring distributive justice. Only rulers were able to do that. Consequently there was little expansion of applications of Aquinas' theology of justice for several centuries. (One exception is that with the rise of nation states in the 16th and 17th centuries, several of the early "fathers of international law" (e.g., **Francisco de Vitoria**, OP and Hugh Grotius) drew on Aquinas' thought to work out how interactions between nations might ethically be carried out.

Originally Catholicism considered the rise of governments in which people had a real voice as an outgrowth of Protestantism—and therefore viewed them with suspicion—or outright condemnation. As more democratic structures became more commonplace, Catholic social teaching emerged—a direct outgrowth of Aquinas' thought. The proliferation of papal encyclicals in the 20th century bears witness to this. And it is a proliferation. Vatican pronouncements regarding social justice far outweigh the number dedicated to sexual or gender issues in the last hundred plus years, although from the attention given to them by U.S. Catholicism one might never guess that. As one writer has pointed out, "As Aquinas continues to explore the ramifications of distributive justice, the echoes of contemporary Catholic social justice teaching become more and more evident. It also becomes increasingly—and disturbingly—clear where [his teaching parts] company with the contemporary philosophy of both totalitarian regimes and free market capitalistic societies."

Aquinas' theology of justice is based on logic and Aristotelian philosophy. Its use in Catholic social thought is sometimes criticized for not being sufficiently grounded in Scripture. In the first article in this series, however, the development of justice appearing first in the Jewish testament was seen as "rightness," as an alignment with God's vision for what humanity and human society was called to be. Perhaps the article will help to clarify that—although not drawing on biblical justice directly—Aquinas' thought is completely in line with that testimony.

THOUGHTS FROM BOB WICK'S RETREAT



The opportunity to hear Dr. Robert Wick speak was a welcome one for me for two reasons: First, I wanted to do something special as part of my Lenten preparation for Easter; second, I had previously read articles and parts of books written by him and had found them interesting and helpful.

This mini-retreat did not disappoint. Dr. Wicks was a well-prepared and well-organized speaker. His stories were highly illustrative and certainly engaging. As he was talking to us about gaining and maintaining perspective, he threw in one-

liners that demonstrated something of how he maintains his own perspective.

There were a number of quotes I wrote down (that helps me remember better, even if I never read them again), but there were four that I most wanted to remember and share:

1. Lent is about pruning. Just as pruning a shrub results in an increase in new growth and blossoming, pruning away those self-concerns that keep me from becoming the person God created and called me to be results in a closer relationship with God and with others.
2. If we are to be in service to others, either formally or informally, we need to be present to others with *respect*. His question was: How do people feel when they are with you?
3. It is important to have a protocol for daily self-care: to care for one's self physically, emotionally and spiritually. He suggested that part of this should be a brief review at the end of a day: How did the events of my day make me feel? Do I need to adjust my stance to find the appropriate balance between being present/in service and backing off a little to gain a better perspective?
4. When we are discouraged and we don't see positive results, Dr. Wicks urged us to remember: "We are not in the success business—we are in the faithfulness business."

-PEGGY SHOUSE

Our Mission is to befriend all. I respect others and let them know by my actions that they are the beloved and cherished Child of God. That God takes great delight in all of us. Listen and really be PRESENT to him. To do this prayer is essential and we are challenged to keep it alive. This enables us to avoid burn out, to be passionate about our mission. Pray, take walks and do things that help re-create us. This enables us to rejoice in our life, to surrender and be free to leap into the darkness. Take deep breaths and go within yourself to gather the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Take care of yourself and don't give your joy away. Enjoy your friends, the ones who show you your gifts and talents and be grateful for the friends who challenge you.

-CATHY BUNTING

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL PARISH COUNCIL MINUTES

FEBRUARY 10, 2015

Pastor's Report

Fr. Dick announced (the decision to increase Laureen Brunelli's new position as the Director of Evangelization. She will now work 30 hours per week, up from 20 hours per week. She will allocate an additional 7 hours per week for evangelization and 3 hours for communication. She began these additional responsibilities on February 1, 2015. These additional hours will be focused on proclamation of the Good News. Michael Keating has agreed to chair the Outreach and Engagement Committee.

Fr. Dick also said that the Estate of Lou Vadorsky left us \$10,000 which can be used for any purpose.

Pastoral Associate

Chris stated that during Lent the liturgy committee will emphasize the prayer of discipleship.

There will be a banner for side of building up for Lent. The banner will state 'Be Open and Surprised by God'.

Hirsch Electric has completed the in-kind upgrade to electrical plant. The only step needed for completion is for BGE to inspect and give the OK. The church will need to shut down entire plant for one day for BGE to complete the inspection. A notice will go out to inform the parish of this date. Mr. Dimmer has done much work to get this done.

Chris noted that Anne Gibson informed him of the status of – Shield the Vulnerable – (the web site training for all parish volunteers). As of 2/10/15 she has identified 137 volunteers who need the training. Forty-one (of 42) of these are individuals who have substantial contact with minors. Ninety-six other volunteers have completed the training. We are 50% compliant on this front. Fr. Dick added that it is important that this be done. We MUST have the training – we may need this training in any situation at home, work, school and informs us what to do when one sees something awry in your circle. This training guides you with what to do and how to do it regarding child abuse and neglect. Fr. Dick emphasized that for the sake of cause, ourselves and Parish, complete the training. Fr. Dick will emphasize this during his next homily.

Sunday the 22nd of Feb. representatives from the Archdiocese will do the presentation on child safety and child abuse. They will conduct this training between the two morning masses. All are welcome and urged to attend.

Chris gave an update on Louise Gregg's recycling proposal to Council. Chris has talked to City representative regarding recycling. At this point we have two cans designated for curb side pick on Tuesdays. The Council is grateful to Louise for her initiative and work on this. This will help our community to stay Green.

Audrey Added Prior to Finance Committee Report

For the fiscal year 2016 budget, committee members should look at what each needs, wishes for and can do without. This is a task of prioritization. All committees should think how they can include evangelization as part of their overall task.

The Book for Lent: Life on Mission is out – Chris can give out copies.

Finance Committee

Month of January to last year down about 4% in attendance; however per person average donation up 16%.

30 weeks through the end of January attendance is down 7% but giving up 11%.

The question was asked about attendance differences in the three weekend Masses. Committee will break down numbers to see if there is a specific Mass that is declining in numbers.

The Christmas collection was over \$6,000 almost \$3,000 more than last year.

January income \$3500 above budget and expenses were below budget.

Fiscal year to date: income over by \$25,000 and expenses \$24,000 under budget. \$49,000 variance. When monies are given for a specific purpose, they can only be used for that specific purpose. Much of the increase in income is designated for the charities supported by the parish and thus unavailable for general operating expenses.

The Parish Council determined that the parish has been paying the administrative costs of the annual audit for the St Vincent Historical Endowment Fund from our operating expenses. Fr. Dick has reasoned that this payment increased the fund's capital appreciation, thus benefitting the parish in the long run. The Fund made close to \$600 K last year from investments. Given our own community needs in program and maintenance, the Council reasoned that having \$2,000 to use each year for operating expenses was a better use of parishioner donations. Audrey asked Fr. Dick to inform the Historical Trust members of this decision.

Old Business

Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation #1

The Parish Council agreed with unanimous consensus, the Ad Hoc Park Committees recommendation # 1 to regain control of the park and manage it effectively. The report outlines specific activities. The Parish Council outlined items A-L in the report and assessed each. A synopsis of what was discussed is as follows:

- A. Create a Park Sanctuary Committee to coordinate the efforts of St Vincent's parish, including the Park Workgroup and others working to address homelessness in the St. Vincent park.

Noted: We already have this as an active committee

- B. Change the norm in the park on trash and excess belongings stored in the park and along our fence to prevent the park from becoming an encampment.

Noted: efforts have already been made to clear park of permanent place for those using park to store materials.

- C. Assign St. V's Maintenance Superintendent to assist in park maintenance and for the Park Sanctuary Committee to engage the park residents and other sources of volunteers in our efforts to maintain the cleanliness of the park on a daily basis.

Noted: This will be an on-going endeavor. The superintendent already has done such actions as discard unused clothing, pick up trash, wake people up in doorways, etc. The biggest challenge for cleanliness is on Mondays after donations have been left in the park. The superintendent currently cleans these materials. Once the superintendent is finished his backlog of maintenance Mike Kelly would like to call on the superintendent to offer assistance with park clean when needed. Michael would also will need volunteers to help, also.

- D. Educate the parish on the causes, and consequences of homelessness.

Noted: Michael Kelly will to organize this effort.

- E. Create a relationship and maintain the ties with the volunteer groups who distribute food and clothing in the park to see our point of view and maintain a sense of order and self-cleaning, i.e., don't drop off pallettes of box lunches and expect that folks will clean up after themselves (particularly on Sunday mornings).

Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.

- F. Create a relationship with Baltimore Department of Public Works and volunteer groups to enforce the new cleanliness norms.

Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.

- G. Repair and provide regular maintenance of the physical environment (i.e. repair the benches and general grounds)

Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.

- H. Create formal linkages with park outreach workers (currently Bon Secours) and the City's outreach coordinator (Gabby Knighton) and the parish (through the **Sanctuary Committee**) to make sure we are coordinating our efforts, identifying problems and not working at cross purposes.

Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.

- I. Train a small number of volunteers in the parish to engage the park regulars in one-on-one relationships.
Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort; however, it was noted that this will require considerable training and focus to ensure safety and to avoid mixed messages regarding mission
- J. Formulate procedures involving those who work in the rectory and those who volunteer or do outreach in the park that strengthens security benefiting residents and the parish
Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.
- K. Create and implement a staffing (volunteers and outreach workers) and a finance model to implement this strategy.
Noted: Michael Kelly is spearheading this effort.
- L. Consider adding more lighting and/or security cameras to enhance security
Noted: The Facilities Committee will discuss the need/budget available for more lighting in the park

Final comment: The council agreed that all ideas A-L on the Ad Hoc Park Committee recommendations #1 can and should be embraced.

The Council decided to expand the scope and responsibilities of the existing Park Working Group rather than follow the recommendation to form another committee. It will retain its current name because of concerns with the use of the term 'sanctuary' and its connection to church efforts with illegal immigrants.

Parish Council Guest Presentations

Mary Lynn Myers wished to address the Parish Council regarding some ideas to address homelessness. They were as follows:

- create a day of reflection within the Parish for homelessness prevention
- share stories of interactions with people who experience homelessness
- offer the parish surveys regarding people who experience homelessness
- offer classes or other methods of education regarding people who experience homelessness

No specific action was taken on these ideas; however, the Parish Council voice appreciation for her concern and willingness to share her ideas and asked her to work with Michael and the Park Working Group which has responsibility now for parish education..

Kevin Daly wished to address the Parish Council regarding possible funding opportunities. His ideas are as follows:

Kevin offered to apply to the Open Society Institute to become a supported fellow. This foundation addresses local Baltimore City issues that address the community and funds a person who belongs to an organization. Kevin is willing to be that person who can work with Michael Kelly to assist with many of the Park activities. The proposed project must benefit the community at large and the foundation offers 8-12 grants of up to \$60,000 to do this work over an 18 month period. This can also be seen as an evangelization opportunity. The Parish Council supported Kevin's proposal which should be coordinated with Mike Kelly--The application is due by March 2.

Chris circulated a letter offered by Harold Burns regarding the Park. No action was taken however, its contents will be discussed during the March Parish Council meeting.

New Business

None

It was also noted that the cast iron fence on the north side of the parking lot has several areas of damage that need to be repaired before they get worse. This will require further investigation.

WEST FAÇADE RESTORATION

It is now complete! If you have not walked around the building to see it, these photo reveal the new paint on the restored façade. Funding for this portion of the restoration came from our Historic Trust Fund and a grant from Preservation Maryland in the amount of \$3,500. We are grateful to them for this financial assistance. We will continue the restoration of the South (park side) and East (front) this Spring. Donations for this work are welcome.



And now that we have our west building façade restored, we will be putting up the first banner to help us in our efforts to join in the ministry of Jesus who came to “proclaim the good news about God” (Mark 1: 14). This is the first of what we plan to be an ongoing effort to use our building to help us in our work of witnessing to the goodness of God and evangelizing the wider community of Baltimore.



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LENT AND EASTER AT ST. VINCENT'S 2015

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE OF SERVICES AND EVENTS

March 29	Palm Sunday 7:15 PM (<i>Saturday</i>) 9:30 AM and 11:45 AM	Mass with the reading of the Passion and, at 9:30 AM, singing and a procession with palms around the outside of the church
April 1	Tenebrae ("Shadows") 7:30 PM	Readings and Psalms with diminishing light This meditative and prayerful service in the early Christian tradition contemplates the betrayal, abandonment and death of Our Lord.
April 2	Holy Thursday 6 PM Jewish Seder 8 PM The Last Supper	End of Lent and beginning of the <i>Triduum</i> Dinner, prayers and song (<i>Seder by ticket only</i>) The last Mass until the Resurrection Church is open for prayer until 11PM
April 3	Good Friday 3 PM 12 PM	The Liturgy of the Hours throughout the day A children's liturgy (<i>preschool and up</i>) that reflects on the Passion of our Lord Social Action Committee leads a the Way of the Cross focusing on peace and justice throughout downtown Baltimore (<i>starts at City Hall</i>)
April 4	7:30 PM Holy Saturday 9:30 PM and <i>through the night until – 8 AM</i>	The Passion of Our Lord according to John Church is open for prayer until 11 PM. The Easter Vigil begins with the lighting of the new Easter Fire and Exultet outside then is continued inside with readings and meditations presented by parishioners. While we wait and keep watch for the Resurrection of the Lord, we tell the story of Salvation through the Jewish Scriptures.
April 5	Easter Sunday 8:30 AM (<i>note earlier time than typical Sunday Mass</i>) 11:45 AM	The Celebration of the Resurrection! Epistle and Gospel Readings, Homily, Liturgy of the Water and Liturgy of the Eucharist <i>Easter breakfast for all follows the service.</i> Second Mass for Easter