

LENT-EASTER

"At the foot of the Cross is where the repentant sinner finds comfort, where the troubled soul finds courage, where the soul already sanctified finds the tenderness of love."

-St. Gaspar



THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY



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EDITORIAL

While the word “conversion” might seem a topic exclusive to Lent, in point of fact the Easter season offers yet more opportunity to reflect on and deepen within us the grace of the Risen One and the Spirit of Pentecost without which no thoroughgoing change is possible for those who traverse the 40 Days of Lent followed by the Week of Weeks comprising Eastertide. So at whatever point in the broad sweep of these seasons this issue reaches you, their theme will hopefully be just as timely. You will meet some great figures of the Bible and Tradition whose conversions shaped history as well as personal stories of profound change owing to encounters with the Holy that set their authors in new directions.

I hope your own narrative will resonate with the ones recounted here as we are challenged to renewal by the church’s liturgical itineraries. As Pope Francis reminded members of the Roman Curia in his Christmas address last year: “Conversion is a never-ending story. The worst thing that could happen to us is to think that we are no longer in need of conversion, either as individuals or as a community. To be converted is to learn ever anew how to take the Gospel message seriously and to put it into practice in our lives. It is not simply about avoiding evil but doing all the good that we can. That is what it means to be converted. Where the Gospel is concerned, we are always like children needing to learn.”

Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S.

01

REPENT?

By Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S.

Many of us will have embarked on the Lenten-Easter journey Ash Wednesday when we were signed with the cross, as on the day of our baptism, by a biblical symbol of repentance for our sins. We may have heard the accompanying words, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Those words, of course, are the same words with which Jesus began his public ministry: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1:15). Now in Greek the word often translated as “repent” (and sometimes “be converted”) is *metanoia*. It is the word that set the tone for all Christ’s preaching. But I have come to think the usual translations are not quite on the mark. For one thing, they come off sounding very moralistic. They seem to burden people immediately with a sense that the gospel is a dreary business of straightening oneself out. If the first thing I told you was, “You need to repent,” I’m not so sure you would believe me if I went on to say, “And this is ‘good news’.” The connotation of the words “repent” and “conversion” come off as more negative than positive, at least to my ears.

Which is one reason I prefer a more literal translation of *metanoia*, namely, “Change your mind.” But more importantly, it seems to me that when you go on and read the rest of the gospel, the intent of Jesus’ preaching, more than anything else, was precisely an effort to change peoples’ minds -- about God, first of all, then about themselves, and finally about others.

Didn’t the Lord, for example, ask us to change our minds about God? A God of unconditional love; a God who searches for the lost sheep and does not abandon it, but rejoices to find it; a God who waits for the prodigal son and does not reject him, but holds a feast in his honor when he returns; a God who cares less for religious customs than for mercy; a God whom we are invited to call by a new name —Abba— so different from the sacred Name YHWH which, if pronounced by anyone but the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement would be considered blasphemy.

And didn’t the Lord bring about a change of mind about ourselves? To see ourselves not as lepers, or tax collectors, or Gentiles —those unclean and outside the Law -- but as children of God? Think of the woman caught in adultery; the Magdalene from whom he cast seven demons; or the Samaritan woman with whom he sat by the well despite her

six husbands or the man born blind who others were quick to think some sin of his or his parents was responsible for his condition? How differently they must have seen themselves after they met the Christ. And what of the poor, the hungry, and the lowly, whom he called “blessed”?

Finally, didn’t the Lord invite a change of mind about others? Not to see other people as destined for judgment because they worship at another place, or speak a foreign tongue; not as enemies because they refuse to hear or receive us; not as more guilty of sin because they suffer misfortune; nor as unworthy because they have less than we do. No, not any of these things, but as brothers and sisters, knowing full well how publicans and prostitutes are entering the reign of God before us.

That’s why I think “changing our minds” is the heart of “conversion” and what it means to “repent.” But the admonition received on Ash Wednesday has a second part, namely to believe in the gospel. The midpoint of the Paschal cycle has us renewing our baptismal promises on Easter Sunday. Like the formula for the imposition of ashes, it also has two parts: the renunciation of sin and the profession of faith. If Lent placed the accent on the former, the Easter season invites us to live ever more deeply from the latter as summarized in the articles of the Creed. They contain the program for our ongoing conversion as we live the new life conferred on us by our baptism.

Beginning with our faith in the triune God. For conversion means becoming people of the Trinity, able to translate “one God in three persons” into patterns of human relationship freed from subordination and non-recognition of difference, relationships characterized by mutuality and co-equality. So the next time you recite the Creed, think about changing your mind about relationships.

Conversion also means becoming people of the Incarnation, of the Word which came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was incarnate of the Virgin Mary: people who celebrate the flesh which God has assumed, with all its dignity and all its integrity, people known for our delight in creation, our exuberance, and our insistence that the body God has made a temple of the divine presence is good, and the gift of sexuality something to be celebrated. So we might have to change our mind over

matter as well.

Conversion also means becoming people of the Redemption, who believe Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose again, according to the Scriptures. People who demonstrate with courage our belief that old forms give way to new ones, that the passing of an old order presages the birth of a new, that loss does indeed promise transformation; in short, that death is followed by resurrection. So we might have to change our mind about change.

Conversion also means becoming people of the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life who spoke through the prophets. This is the Advocate Jesus promised would guide the disciples to all truth--including many things they could not bear at the time (cf. Jn. 16:12-13). So when that Spirit comes, as on the day of Pentecost, we must be prepared to make bold proclamation, ready to speak new tongues, so every person can hear the good news in his or her own language. So we might have to change our mind about truth too.

And finally, conversion means becoming people of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Willing to challenge ourselves more and more to become the testing-ground for God's reign, the sacrament of a new humanity, the precursor of a new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). So we might have to change our mind about who we really are.

The early church had to struggle with its own "change of mind" in the days following Pentecost. It's no wonder the longest period of the church year consists of the "green Sundays" following the feast of the Holy Spirit. We need such time to reflect and to translate into action all that the previous months have shown us before we begin again as we await the Advent of the Christ. For example, do you remember how a God-fearing centurion named Cornelius showed up at Peter's door, prompted by a vision? Peter had just seen a vision in a dream that he was about to understand, namely, that God would no longer divide the human race into "clean" and "unclean" people. That the Gentiles too -- beginning with Cornelius and his household -- were now included in God's plan of salvation. And the proof was there for Peter to behold, for the Holy Spirit fell upon all [those present] (Acts 10:44).

But those, like James, whose sense of right and wrong was refined by the traditions of their ancestors, were challenged by Peter's change of mind about who and what is acceptable in God's sight -- above all, when it came to these foreigners, these sinners, these unclean ones, these dogs, these Gentiles. Paul especially had a heck of a time changing James' mind. That's one reason he went up to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. Paul had to convince James that he truly was set apart by God and called through his grace. And James would go only so far when it came to letting the Gentiles

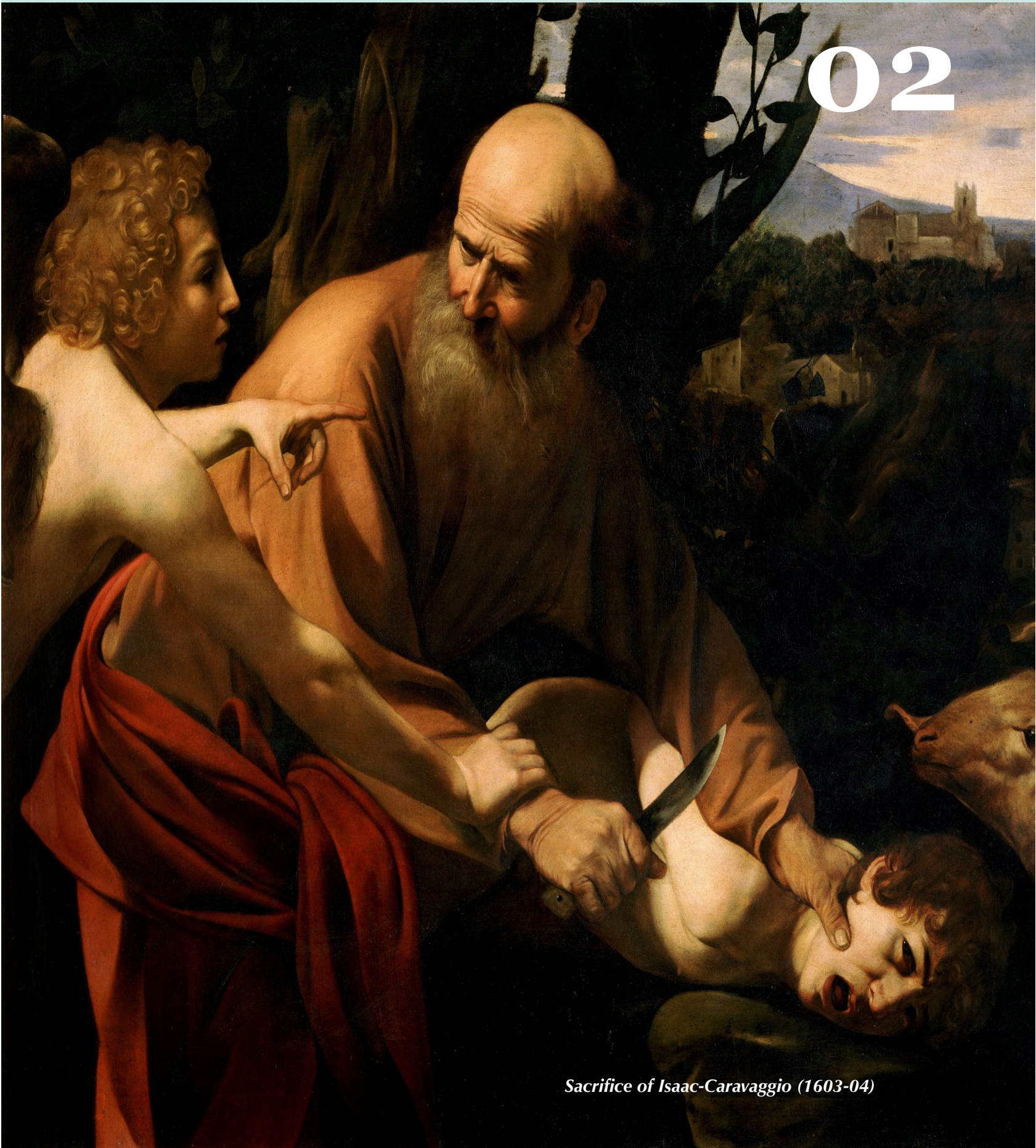
be free of Jewish traditions: the very ones Paul bragged about, saying he progressed in Judaism beyond many of [his] contemporaries among [his] race, since [he] was even more a zealot for [his] ancestral traditions (Gal. 1:14). The tension over such issues was so great even Peter lapsed when he went to Antioch, when some people came there from James, and Peter drew back from the Gentile converts, provoking Paul to oppose Peter to his face because, as Paul would say, Peter stood condemned (cf. Gal. 2:11-12).

It seems Peter wasn't fully ready to hear what the author of Ephesians would one day say: that those once [kept] far off became near by the blood of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:13-14). Even "the Rock" stumbled, forgetting how in the new dispensation there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:27). Thus, all the dividing-walls of the ancient world were leveled in the one body of the Lord, the living temple of God's glory. This is why, I think, the Christian gospel was such good news to those on the margins of ancient society. As the first letter of Peter says to newly-baptized converts: Once you were 'no people' but now you are God's people (1 Pt. 2:10). Even people -- no, especially people -- who were once outsiders, could now find a place at table with Jesus' other friends: people like an Ethiopian eunuch and that Samaritan woman; people like the half-breed Timothy and that woman caught in adultery; people like the pagan Dionysius and Nicodemus, the Pharisee. All of these have found a place together with those who already belonged to the chosen people: like Mary, the Twelve apostles, the holy women, Jesus' brothers and, of course, Saul of Tarsus.

But it's hard to imagine all those people in one room, isn't it? And let's be honest, we'd find it easier to love some of those folks than others. While their counterparts in today's Church could give us reason to wonder, "Do they really belong in our company?" But should we ever find ourselves asking such a question -- whether from fear, or prejudice or contempt -- we'd do well to remember the quarrels of the early church over the Gentiles, and remember how Paul's change of mind, for the most part won the day: his gospel of freedom and acceptance being the one most fully embraced by the church as being not of human origin but coming through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). The same Paul whose startling statement helps me deal with matters such as these: God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another (1 Cor. 12:24-25). And believe me, do those words require me to change my mind, every time I hear them!

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02



Sacrifice of Isaac-Caravaggio (1603-04)

FROM ABRAM TO ABRAHAM: THE BIBLE'S FIRST CONVERSION STORY

By Linda M. MacCammon

Genesis 12-22 depicts the transformation of Abraham from a self-interested and often manipulative opportunist to a faithful and obedient servant of God. In their first encounter, the relationship between God and Abraham (who is initially called Abram) can best be described as a transactional, quid pro quo agreement. Yahweh initiates contact and instructs Abram to leave his home in Haran and go to the land of Canaan (Gen.12:1-3). It's a long and arduous journey, so God sweetens the offer, promising Abram an heir, enough land to accommodate a "great nation," and unstinting care and protection from his enemies. God even suggests that Abram will become so great that "all the families of the earth" will benefit from his obedient example. Abram's response to Yahweh's generosity is instantaneous: "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him" (Gen. 12:4). While Abram doesn't offer an explanation for his behavior, it seems plausible that his obedience is based on fear of a powerful foreign God and self-interested calculations that consider the benefits the Deity promises to provide. Abram thus departs from Haran in good faith without a second thought or backward glance.

As he leads his household to Canaan, Yahweh reassures Abram that the promise of land will be fulfilled, despite the presence of Canaanites who reside there (Gen.12:6-9). He responds by building altars and invoking God's name. Abram's public affirmation of loyalty to Yahweh seals the covenant partnership and establishes faith, obedience, and worship as the appropriate attitudes and actions of a good covenant partner; however, Abram's brief sojourn in Egypt and return to Canaan reveal the shallow, performative nature of his commitment.

As the narrative continues, Abram and his family encounter a variety of threats, challenges, and disappointments and his response demonstrates a notable lack of faith in God. His scheming against Pharaoh and King Abimelech in the sister-wife stories (Gen.12:10-16; 20:1-17), his ongoing complaints about the lack of an heir (Gen. 15:1-20; 17:17-19), and his willingness to impregnate Hagar at the urgings of his wife, Sarai (Gen.16:1-15) are all

signs of a man who doubts and who is willing to take matters into his own hands to protect himself, turn a profit, and produce an heir. Yahweh intervenes but rather than act as the strict disciplinarian of the primeval history, God is a patient and tolerant mentor, giving Abram the freedom to make mistakes and to doubt God's power and promises. In the wife-sister stories, for example, God doesn't punish Abram for his deceptive schemes; instead, God intervenes to counter Abram's meddling, punish the lecherous rulers, and arrange for Abram and his wife to depart the kingdoms wealthier than when they arrived.

The first significant change in Abram's self-serving attitude occurs in Genesis 15, when Yahweh establishes the first explicit covenant with him—an event that forms the basis for Paul's claims in Galatians. Coming to Abram in a vision, God reassures Abram of the plan but is met with a sharp rebuke (Gen.15:1-3). Without an heir, Abram's considerable wealth and family name will likely become the property of a trusted steward. Yahweh responds, telling Abram to "Look toward the heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness (Gen.15: 4-6).

What did Abram see in the stars that prompted the shift? The answer lies in Abram's changed sense of perspective and proportion. As with many human beings, Abram's vision is narrow, extending only to what he sees and wants in the moment. In leading him outside to look at the stars, Yahweh draws Abram out of his narrow perspective, shifting his gaze from the immediate moment to a vast new horizon that transcends his own time and place. Abram sees and suddenly understands. The stars are the future generations of a great nation that he will father. Abram's brief but revelatory glimpse into the divine plan, coupled with his previous experiences with the Deity, convince him—at least for the moment—that God can be trusted.

This episode reflects a relationship that has grown since their first encounter. They now share



“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now

I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld

your son, your only son, from me” (22:9-12)

a comfortable yet volatile relationship that benefits both parties beyond the transactional quid pro quo of Genesis 12. On the one hand, Abram has the freedom to doubt God’s intentions and to voice his misgivings without fear of punishment. On the other hand, Yahweh uses Abram’s doubts to teach him what it truly means to be a good covenant partner. The outcome of Abram’s outburst bears this out, for in doubting God’s intentions, Abram has gained a greater understanding of the divine plan and a deepening trust in God. Doubt thus becomes an important catalyst for spiritual growth. Yahweh clearly shares this view, for it is only after resolving Abram’s crisis of faith that the Deity deems him righteous enough to enter into a more explicit covenant—but not without further assurances.

The pattern of missteps, mentoring, and spiritual progress continues, culminating in Genesis 17:1-14, when God institutes a more formal and exacting covenant with Abram after the one "cut" through animal sacrifice in Genesis 15:7-21. Now both Abram and Sarai are renamed Abraham and Sarah in keeping with their new status as parents of “a multitude of nations,” male circumcision is introduced (another bloodshedding that signifies their binding agreement), and the couple is finally blessed with Isaac, the long-awaited child of the promise (Gen. 21:1-7). Everything seems to be going according to plan, but like the sojourn in Egypt, the final two episodes in Abraham’s story test the character and conviction of the new and improved Abraham.

The first episode reintroduces King Abimelech (Gen. 21:22-32). Having prior experience with Abraham, he suggests that they enter into a covenant and implores Abraham to “swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have resided as an alien” (21:23-24). Abraham agrees to the covenant, but is immediately tested when Abimelech’s servants seize his well. Rather than retaliate against the ruler, who claims ignorance of the deed, Abraham emulates God’s good example in Genesis 15, offering Abimelech valuable livestock to secure his confidence and trust (21:29-31). Clearly God’s patient teaching is paying off, for Abraham seems a changed man. The story of the binding of Isaac (Gen.22:1-19), however, raises the stakes considerably.

In a speech that seems almost sadistic, God pointedly reminds Abraham of his deep affection for his son before

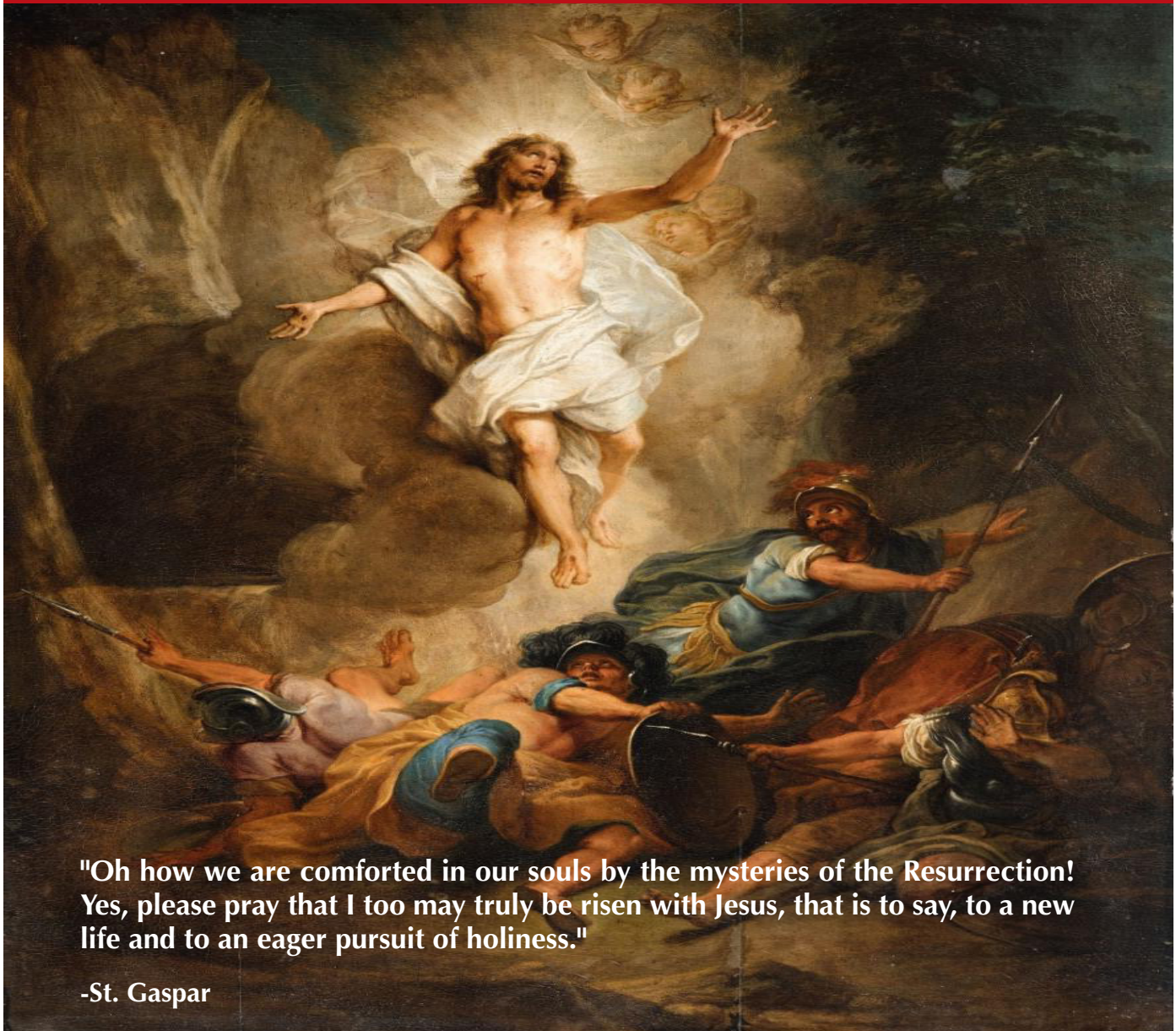
demanding that Abraham sacrifice him (Gen. 22:1-2). This is a stunning reversal, for now it is God, rather than Abraham, who jeopardizes the divine plan. Abraham’s response harkens back to their first meeting in Genesis 12. Rather than complain or take matters into his own hands, Abraham simply obeys, even rising early to start the journey. As the time of sacrifice nears, obedience, faith, and worship take on dark and sinister meanings.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (22:9-12)

Simply put, to fear the Lord is to know the Lord in a deep and intimate way. This knowledge eliminates the doubts that have plagued Abraham’s mind and heart throughout the narrative, finding confirmation in the final verses of the story when Abraham renames the place of sacrifice: “And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the place “The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided” (Gen 22:13-14). God thus provides the animal as a substitute for Isaac, prefiguring Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. His story reveals that the blood of the covenant symbolizes more than binding covenant relations. It also symbolizes the triumph of faith over doubt. Abraham’s status as a great patriarch who fears and knows the Lord is achieved toward the end of his life, only after many misjudgments and mistakes.

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**The Missionaries of
the Precious Blood,
Atlantic Province wish
you a Happy Easter!**



**"Oh how we are comforted in our souls by the mysteries of the Resurrection!
Yes, please pray that I too may truly be risen with Jesus, that is to say, to a new
life and to an eager pursuit of holiness."**

-St. Gaspar

A VOICE FROM TRADITION

THE CONVERSION OF ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE (+258)

(The following passage is from Cyprian's Letter to Donatus in which he speaks of the profound changes he experienced upon his conversion to Christianity which left many people he knew prior dumbfounded. His biographer, St. Pontius, was also left speechless at the transformation and exclaimed, "Has anyone ever seen such a miracle?" Cyprian, by then bishop of Carthage, was beheaded in 258 during the persecution of Valerian)

While I was still lying in darkness and gloomy night, wavering hither and there, tossed about on the foam of this boastful age, and uncertain of my wandering steps, knowing nothing of my real life, and remote from truth and light, I used to regard it as a difficult matter, and especially as difficult in respect of my character at that time, that a man should be capable of being born again — a truth which the divine mercy had announced for my salvation — and that a man quickened to a new life in the laver of saving water should be able to put off what he had previously been; and, although retaining all his bodily structure, should be himself changed in heart and soul.



Pope Francis goes to confession during a Lenten penance service in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 25, 2022.

For as I myself was held in bonds by the innumerable errors of my previous life, from which I did not believe that I could by possibility be delivered, so I was disposed to acquiesce in my clinging vices; and because I despaired of better things, I used to indulge my sins as if they were actually parts of me, and indigenous to me. But after that, by the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, had been infused into my reconciled heart.



How, said I, is such a conversion possible, that there should be a sudden and rapid divestment of all which, either innate in us has hardened in the corruption of our material nature, or acquired by us has become inveterate by long accustomed use? These things have become deeply and radically engrained within us. When does he learn thrift who has been used to liberal banquets and sumptuous feasts? And he who has been glittering in gold and purple, and has been celebrated for his costly attire, when does he reduce himself to ordinary and simple clothing? One who has felt the charm of the fasces and of civic honours shrinks from becoming a mere private and inglorious citizen. The man who is attended by crowds of clients, and dignified by the numerous association of an officious train, regards it as a punishment when he is alone. It is inevitable, as it ever has been, that the love of wine should entice, pride inflate, anger inflame, covetousness disquiet, cruelty stimulate, ambition delight, lust hasten to ruin, with allurements that will not let go their hold.

These were my frequent thoughts. For as I myself was held in bonds by the innumerable errors of my previous life, from which I did not believe that I could by possibility be delivered, so I was disposed to acquiesce in my clinging vices; and because I despaired of better things, I used to indulge my sins as if they were actually parts of me, and indigenous to me. But after that, by the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, had been infused into my reconciled heart — after that, by the agency of the Spirit breathed from heaven, a second birth had restored me to a new man — then, in a wondrous manner, doubtful things at once began to assure themselves to me, hidden things to be revealed, dark things to be enlightened, what before had seemed difficult began to suggest a means of accomplishment, what had been thought impossible, to be capable of being achieved; so that I was enabled to acknowledge that what previously, being born of the flesh, had been living in the practice of sins, was of the earth earthly, but had now begun to be of God, and was animated by the Spirit of holiness. You yourself assuredly know and recollect as well as I do what was taken away from us, and what was given to us by that death of evil, and that life of virtue. You yourself know this without my information. Anything like boasting in one's own praise is hateful, although we cannot in reality boast but only be grateful for whatever we do not ascribe to man's virtue but declare to be the gift of God; so that now we sin not is the beginning of the work of faith, whereas that we sinned before was the result of human error. All our power is of God; I say, of God. From Him we have life, from Him we have strength, by power derived and conceived from Him we do, while yet in this world, foreknow the indications of things to come. Only let fear be the keeper of innocence, that the Lord, who of His mercy has flowed into our hearts in the access of celestial grace, may be kept by righteous submissiveness in the hostelry of a grateful mind, that the assurance we have gained may not beget carelessness, and so the old enemy creep upon us again.

03

IN TRAIN-ING

By Fr. Peter Santandreu

You're on a train. It's slow but it's moving. Your ticket has been purchased by someone else and you are grateful for the gift. Every so often it stops at a station where people get on and off. You too can get off if you like, but then you wouldn't be moving toward your final destination. There's always the possibility of getting back on in the future, or even walking the rest of the way if you're so disposed, but that only takes longer. The best bet is to stay on the train all the way to the end because; despite everything, it's the best option you have.

This fictional train ride can serve as a glimpse into our relationship with God and our need for conversion. Conversion takes time, it's often slow going, and it's the effect of divine Grace that allows us to progress toward the ultimate goal.

Time. One of the common temptations in Christianity is our desire to be like other Christians. We look around our churches and community gatherings to look for people who seem to have it all together. We might even attend a talk or hear a homily where the presenter shares his/her own extraordinary conversion story. These are often fantastic tales that should inspire us to rejoice in the good things God has worked in the life of another, but sometimes leave us worried that our own journeys pale in comparison to these "exemplary" Christians. We might even complain about the absence of a Paul-like appearance of the Lord in our own lives (Acts 9:1-22) thinking: "If only Jesus would just tell me what to do the same way he melted the hardened heart of Saul, then I would respond with the same zealous spirit." The reality is, we are on a train, and it's moving slowly. So slowly we might not think it's moving at all, especially when the bullet train on the next track whizzes by!

Slow going. The normal course of things is, after all, slow. The slow march toward adulthood often goes unnoticed until one day, without warning, our clothes no longer fit. Even though it happens incrementally over time, this barely noticeable difference is marked by certain milestones along the way. These are moments of realization that stand out in our minds as markers of progress. When it comes to our conversion in Christ, it can be as simple as the acknowledgment I was a little less impatient with that annoying co-worker last week than I had been previously. Or I was able to avert my eyes from a temptation toward lust a bit quicker than I did a month ago. Or I'm now capable of going into a church and being quiet for longer than I could when I was in my twenties. It's like we left the station in Cleveland a while ago but we're already approaching Chicago. It's still a long time until we arrive in Los Angeles, but at least we're not in Cleveland anymore! So while accounts of miraculous "come to Jesus" moments — those instantaneous revelations of God's presence resulting in 180° turns over night — do exist, they are not meant for everyone. For the rest of us it's best to accept the train God has placed us on without complaining about the "free tickets" others have received.

04

Grace. The thing about a train ride is you don't have to do all that much — you barely do anything. The ride doesn't depend on us at all. The train, piloted by a trained professional, will follow its course without our involvement. All we have to do is not get off at the wrong stop. For God is indeed the conductor of our conversion. The Holy Spirit leads us on, calls us out of ourselves, and provides us with the spiritual power to respond to the call. For our part the Lord asks us only to be open, to trust the process, to allow ourselves to be brought along.

There are two mistakes here that can lead away from the golden mean. We could follow the path of Pelagius and erroneously think of the progress we are making as a direct result of our own efforts. This would be as ridiculous as the passenger who attributes the train's smooth ride to the fact she was able to finish the crossword puzzle before the train left the station. The other extreme is thinking we've been given a ticket so there's nothing more to do. He stays at home, sits on the couch, takes his rest and (mistakenly) confident God will miraculously transport him to the final destination without any cooperation or input on his part. Any one could see how, in both cases, that's simply not how it works.

Indeed, our journey of conversion is something that requires our cooperation. While we can talk about our "conversion experiences," they're never completely passive events that just happen to us. God is the one directing the pilgrimage. He provides the means ("ticket") by allowing His Only-Begotten to suffer and die on our behalf. But we must still choose to use it ("go to the station and get on the train") and, in taking this path, realize the journey is best understood as an ever-deepening submission to the will of the One who calls us to Himself. This isn't quick. True, the burden is light and the yoke easy (Mt 11:30), but there is still a burden and a yoke ("pick up your cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24-26). Ultimately, Jesus is the one who makes all of this possible. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6), the means to reach the destination.

In the final analysis, I realize the train analogy falls short in several ways. For what it's worth, if it has connected with you on any level, don't get off the train once you're on it. Remaining on the train includes being faithful to a life of prayer, reception of the sacraments, and works of charity — especially when it seems things are at a standstill and we're not going anywhere.

Saying "yes" to the train ride is, moreover an implicit "no" to other forms of transportation. It can sometimes feel confining — like those sleeping berths on trains — like we're missing out on what others are doing. But that's to be expected if we stay on the train. Other options don't exist for us because we know they can't take us where we need to go. For us "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20), and we've been given a way to arrive. The ticket's been bought and paid for, the train is ready to leave the station, are we ready for the ride?

Fr. Peter Santandreu is a priest of the Diocese of Buffalo currently studying canon law in Washington.

BEGUILED DREAMS

By Antonio Selvaggi

05

(In honour of St. Augustine of Hippo – A gift — and dedicated to Adeodatus, Augustine's son, and the boy's unnamed mother.)

...a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; And man became a living being.
(Gen.2.6-7)

And there was evening and there was morning....
(Gen.1)

Can a grateful man become greater than his weakness?
Grateful men have become weak,
And greater men still.
So weakness is a gift,
Received with a heavy heart.
When tears are not enough
And the beginning feels like the end –
Even before it has even begun.
All is awry.

I wept, and I wept, and I wept.

*Who can untie this most twisted and intricate mass of knots?
It is a filthy thing:
I do not wish to think about it;
I do not wish to look upon it.
I fell away from you,
my God,
and I went astray,
too far astray from you,
the support of my youth, and
I became to myself
a land of want.
(Confessions of St. Augustine 2, 10)*

*Who told you that you were naked?
Have you eaten of the tree
Of which I commanded you
Not to eat?
(Gen.3.11)*

*The serpent beguiled me,
And I ate.
(Gen.3.13)*

And there was evening and there was morning....

I climbed onto a dream
A ladder of slips and falls
With misguided rungs and unstable feet,
Shaken by uneven ground.
Thinking that I could climb higher still on my own,
I fell away from you,
Falling back into habit of self;
Onto the face of the ground.

No mist could clear my nostrils from the dust
That had formed in my mind.
I have *become to myself*
A whirlpool of filth.
Naked and *astray*,
I wandered through tangents of philosophy
Fettered by iron lust.
I loved Carthage,
How she portrayed herself to be free –
Free from He whom I would come to love.

On my own I forged a chain of desire;
Link by link sequencing a past of regret.
Forgotten and neglected, years turned into rust.
Questioning all direction of thought,
In rhapsody of rhetoric
I casted out torn nets –
Upon wealth, fame and glory,
Entangling myself again and again.

On my own I forged a chain of desire; link by link sequencing a past of regret. Forgotten and neglected, years turned into rust. Questioning all direction of thought, in rhapsody of rhetoric, I casted out torn nets –upon wealth, fame and glory. Entangling myself again and again. Allured by temptation, overwhelmed by irresistibility, overcome by curiosity, conversion pivots itself upon a weakness –upon a gift.

Allured by temptation,
Overwhelmed by irresistibility,
Overcome by curiosity,
Conversion pivots itself upon a weakness

–
Upon a gift.

I wept, and I wept, and I wept.
...and watered the whole face of the
ground –
Can a grateful man become greater than
his weakness?
Great men have become weak,
Grateful men too.
So weakness becomes a lesson in humility

–
A gift:
In being, substantiated by God's grace
In self, reconstituted by His mercy
In living the Paradox of Christian Faith –
By an act of contrition,
A sacrifice,
A knock at the door of Redemption,
A wound that bends Light
In the tears of my mother's eyes.

Selfsame,
Breathe into my nostrils.
My time is near.
The sound of a child's voice
Draws me closer to You;
Closer than a land of want.

*...you know what hour it is, how it is full
time now for you to wake from sleep.
For salvation is nearer to us now than
when we first believed; the night is far
gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast
off the works of darkness and put on the
armor of light; let us conduct ourselves
becomingly as in the day, not in reveling
and drunkenness, not in debauchery and
licentiousness, not in quarreling and*

*jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the flesh, to
gratify its desires.
(Rom. 13.11-14)*

*I desire you,
O justice and innocence,
beautiful and comely to all virtuous eyes,
and I desire this unto a satiety that can
never be satiated.
With you there is true rest and life
untroubled.
He who enters into you enters into the joy
of his Lord,
and he shall have no fear,
and he shall possess his soul most happily
in him
who is the supreme good.
(Confessions 2, 10)*

Breath of Life,
Release me from this lack that I have held
onto –
An empty pride.
Free me from that wrongful promise
I made to myself –
A troubled waste.
Wounded, by opposing your will,
Let your grace flow freely from the side of
your mercy.
Stamp your holy ointment on me now,
Chism my restless hart;
Heal the wounds of my flesh.
O blessed gift Incarnate,
Spare me this earthly toil!
So as to once again become –
A living being.

*Antonio Selvaggi resides in Toronto,
Ontario.*

MESSENGER

By Sharon Miller

The following is the first installment of a two-part narrative of conversion. It is excerpted from the author's forthcoming book "Emergent Heart." Part Two will appear in the next issue.

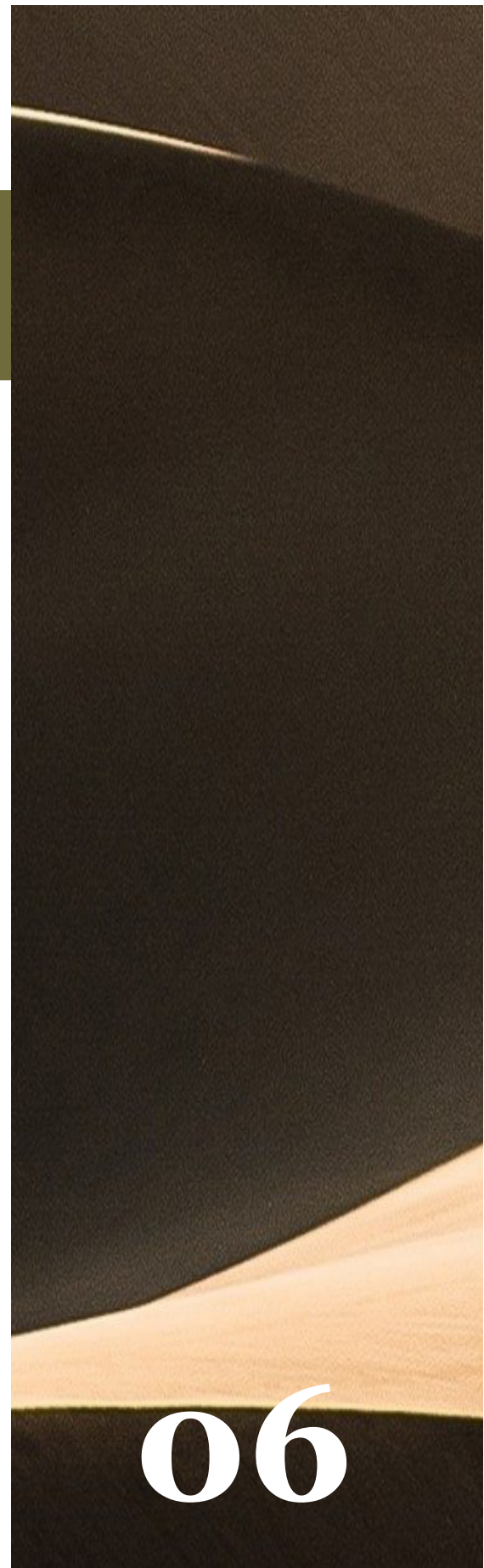
An unkempt man stared unabashedly through the store window. (I was a member of a unique craft collaboration who shared an artistic commonality and all tasks, including working for a few hours per week in our store, located in an eclectic and popular area of Rochester, New York. The mid-seventies marked a period of a fervent craft revival of quality weaving, glass blowing, printing, ceramics, and jewelry.)

The scruffy man passed the display window on several occasions during my brief working hours. I was alone and felt some nervousness from his repeated appearances. One afternoon he entered and looked intently in my direction, and I welcomed him as a prospective customer. Copper colored ringlets framed his head behind a receding hairline and a circular bald spot. Intense eyes, the color of burnt marmalade, looked at me with clarity and benevolence. He wore a wrinkled blue work shirt tucked carelessly into limp jeans with a belt secured a tad high above the waist. My eyes scanned his broad shoulders, lean body, and heavily scuffed work boots. Fingers were nicotine stained and a toxic odor of cigarette smoke from a strong brand hovered in the air.

A counter separated us when he introduced himself as Ed. Ed's posture was erect and grounded as he positioned his hands against a belt buckle in what I came to know as the diamond mudra — a left open palm supporting the right open palm, thumbs touching. I learned the hand position or mudra harmonized the energetic paths of left and right with the stability and inner strength of a "diamond." I smiled whenever I recalled our first meeting!

"May I help you?" I had no recall of his verbal response, but I clearly remembered a resonant voice whose source arose from deeply within. Any anxiety I may have had dissolved and I welcomed his presence. He spoke energetically about Zen Buddhism, and one's inner knowing of the True Self. During that first encounter, he chanted part of the Buddhist Heart Sutra and expressed an affinity with the ancient language of Sanskrit. The title, Heart Sutra, meant heart of the perfection of wisdom; an essence inspiring emptiness through the epitome of compassion. Ed's daily concentration was the longer version of the Heart Sutra he truly echoed.

My life focused on family and social connections, plus a plethora of constructive activities related more to external experiences than a focus on an inner self. I seldom queried, "Who am I?" "What is my True nature?" "What about God?" I was a baptized Roman Catholic and had my first communion and confirmation at the appropriate times of my youth. Decades later, Ed emerged as an impetus for inner inquiry and my spiritual journey.





During his thirty-three years, Ed experienced psychological suffering. Our interactions provided moments of solace, and he felt relative peace because I listened to his heart speak. He was temporarily relieved from a genetic predisposition of mental illness. He frequently demonstrated a keen sense of humor and jovial playfulness. During those moments, I glimpsed a beatific countenance and light heart.

Ed wanted to work but was unable to sustain employment. One of his jobs had been a radio announcer on a classical music station. The rich timbre of his voice and sensitivity to music were the major reasons for being hired. "What happened?" I asked. "I fell asleep during and after a lengthy concerto. Dead air."

Ed invited me to tea at his rooming house located a short distance from the craft cooperative. (No wonder he paced back and forth in front of the store.) He appeared comfortable opening a personal area of his life and I accepted his invitation. I walked hesitantly into a bleakly illuminated and hollow space where he directed me to a small kitchen furnished with a table and wobbly chairs stationed rather precariously on a crumbling linoleum floor. In otherwise blankness, a stunning print of a compassionate bodhisattva was hung on the kitchen wall. The kitchen sink was stained and used tea bags were draped over the water faucet. Ed was congenial and obviously enjoyed entertaining a rare visitor in the otherwise barren atmosphere. He moved lithely in the tight space resembling a spirited leprechaun stirring a pot of liquid gold. He boiled water and selected two fresh tea bags when the steaming kettle suddenly interrupted and pierced the air.

"Oh, I need a cup for you!" Ed opened a tightly secured door to fetch a cup and my eyes responded with shock, as we witnessed a whirling mass of moths exiting from the dark chamber. The dense cloud flew mere inches from our heads. In a moment, the winged creatures dispersed into other rooms of the house. We laughed.

Ed was a true listener and was genuinely interested in my family, life stories, and my perceptions related to many topics. On a couple of occasions, I drove him to my home for dinner visits where he engaged my children and husband. My daughter and son thought him odd yet kind.

Ed frequently recited a soliloquy from a Shakespeare tragedy which prompted conversation, but topics inevitably shifted back to Zen Buddhism. He meditated regularly at the Zen Center of Rochester where Roshi Philip Kapleau founded and directed the Zen community for several years. Ed adamantly recommended I visit the tranquil setting with him. I dismissed the invitation for weeks but finally acquiesced and joined him for a tour of the temple and an experience of meditation. Meditation, during the 1970's, was considered by most people "weird."

I did not realize that crossing the threshold of the Zen Center was a rite of passage. I entered reverent simplicity, an interior designed with a synergy of wood, stone, and

thriving greenery. Elegant Buddhist statuary drew attention to prayerful offerings. The deeply seasoned silence of the temple permeated my mind, body, and spirit.- with a startling flash of "beginner's mind" and a fresh awakening.

A commitment to further meditation initiated me into silence. My typically active mind gradually quieted (I emphasize gradually.) I eventually slipped into sustained moments of stillness and being. I knew a sacred potency was calling me; although incipient, I recognized life would never be the same.

Time elapsed. I accepted a teaching position which meant relinquishing my membership with the craft cooperative. Thus, my relationship with Ed dramatically changed. We crossed paths at the Zen Center or accidentally during our respective walks in the city neighborhood. We naturally disappeared from one another. I remained grateful for our auspicious meeting as our souls met for a season, Ed was a blessed gift and a messenger. Who would have known!?

Meditation became a steadfast practice — emptying and opening to the mystery of Spirit with the true meaning of poverty. Yes, sublime. "Form is empty. Emptiness is form." One could be turned topsy-turvy with this koan — a paradoxical riddle. I recognized the opposites of the temporal world with its conflicts and limitations. However, meditation brightened my three-dimensional experience of the temporal and guided personal agency toward an inherent expression. A cumulative effect of meditation was light shed on the hidden doubts and fears and shadow. As my heart expanded, so did the capacity for vulnerability. Vulnerability was revealed and served to balance the opposites and nurture equanimity. Exalted was a fresh and beginning awareness of the Holy Mother and the sacred heart of Her compassion. I frequently recalled Ed's love of the Heart Sutra — the union of emptiness and compassion — the "diamond essence."

.....A lotus flower took root in the mud and the fecundity of a pond. The sturdy stem responded to the light far above and stretched toward the water's surface. A plump bud formed and ultimately opened with a redolent scent- perhaps, one petal at a time. A jewel resided in the bloom.

Meditation—contemplative prayer nurtured the root of my being. A secular perspective of life transformed over time to an unfolding spiritual dimension. No turning back. I attended the Zen Center for a significant period until I was drawn from its jeweled stepping-stone.

Carefully, over time, I was magnetized toward the Trinity and the Sacred Heart.....and the Holy Eucharist. More on that next issue.

Sharon Miller is a member of the Rochester Mission House.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

By Lorin Alder

Baptism at St. Catherine Catholic Church; Orange Park, Florida

One definition of “conversion” that stands out to me is “a change in character, form, or function” (dictionary.com). This makes me think about the changes I went through in my spiritual life during the various stages of Christian initiation, the formal process of becoming a catechumen, and ultimately by being baptized. Throughout this process there were a variety of changes to my “character, form and function.” I like to think of this process using the metaphor of someone approaching, experiencing and becoming part of the ocean, or if you will, the “Ocean of God.”

I find the ocean to be awe-inspiring like our universe at large. And the idea of coming into relationship with who or what created it all is likewise awe-inspiring. For much of my life I believed in something that was present in and behind all of creation. I didn’t have words for it or a name for it. I simply explored the idea for years in a variety of ways. Certain experiences gave me the sense of it or a quick glimpse into its presence in my life and in the world around me. There was something about it that drew me in — like standing in front of the majestic Yellowstone Falls and feeling drawn into its beauty. Or the massiveness of a mountain peak. Or the smooth flow of a calm river. There is a majestic beauty and peace that one can feel as if it were pulling at you and drawing you in.

Throughout my spiritual journey, meditation has been an important part of my wellness and one of the avenues drawing me into my connection with God. I have been doing a meditation recently where, as I breathe in, I imagine God as the Ocean, and, as I breathe out, I imagine myself as a wave. This relates to my own journey with God — filled with seeking, questioning, testing and exploring — as if I were testing the waters of different approaches to the Divine.

This searching and exploration went on for many years. Sometimes I was interested in what I heard and saw in certain communities of worship and spiritual practice, while other times I was put off by feeling pressured to join certain groups or by the inhumane things humans have done “in the name of God” or to “save souls.”

Something important shifted when I came into a 12-Step recovery program. At this point I was welcomed into a community of people who didn’t require me to follow a specific belief in relation to God. The only thing emphasized was finding some kind of relationship with a Power greater than myself, and which could be the God of my choosing. They shared how I could explore different concepts of God, what that might mean to me in order to find my way to having that spiritual relationship. They emphasized how this was essential for staying sober and moving forward into a better way of life. This was helpful as it freed me to let go of the disdain I felt for some forms of organized religion and the ways they carried out their beliefs and spread their message. It also encouraged me to keep my mind and eyes open to the presence of God at work in my life. The more I did this, the more I saw the results of God’s presence in my life. As I look back now, I can see how this time was like walking on the

shore of the Ocean of God, occasionally looking into the vastness and sometimes touching the water’s edge.

During this time I became close with a few Catholics in my circle of friends. As I got to know them, I noticed the importance of their relationship with God, how it mattered in their lives and how they shared it freely with others. One friend invited me to pray out loud with him a few times; this was my first experience doing that. Another friend invited me to his church for an Easter Mass where I had a poignant and powerful moment of reflection on a passage of Scripture read during the liturgy. Another friend had what seemed to me to be an incredible amount of resiliency owing to his faith in the face of very difficult life challenges. Another inspired me with his dedication to serving those living in poverty and homelessness. These people embodied their faith and from that experience of walking with them I was curious as to what was inspiring and guiding them. These Catholic friends were drawing me in and intriguing enough so that I braved stepping into the waters of God with them. Sometimes dipping my toe to test out the feel and temperature of the water, other times walking in the waves as they crashed and lapped at the shoreline.

As I started attending and later became part of the Rochester Mission House community the attraction of Christ through the Mass continued to draw me. I was also inspired by the many things I learned about the mystics, saints and others in the Catholic tradition. I was inspired by the stories of St. Francis of Assisi, the writings of Thomas Merton, the art, music and wisdom of Hildegard von Bingen, the approach of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in connecting creation’s physical form to God’s presence, the eye-opening insights of James Allison, and the humility of Pope Francis. All of these drew me in as I tested the waters of this tradition and slowly waded further and further into the waters.

As this was happening, I decided to start the process of moving towards baptism and became a catechumen. Throughout this process I felt the loving support of Fr. John, the Mission House community and my sponsor Tom as they walked with me through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults with encouragement, witnessing and care. I also remember different points in the process when they would all join me in the milestones like the Rite of Election and the Scrutinies. I felt supported by a deep connection with others.

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Another community aspect of this experience occurred

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TOGETHER.*

when I joined with others in the initiation process at the local parish. I and my sponsor were welcomed by a group of strangers who would become confidants on this journey towards baptism. We met regularly and learned about many aspects of the church including its history, beliefs and doctrines, stewardship, ministries, liturgy and opportunities for growth in other areas. This was an eye-opening experience to go through with others who were also exploring the faith and preparing to dive in.

As I continued wading deeper and deeper into the “Ocean” of God, I became more and more comfortable and at peace with moving toward baptism. The feeling of community was strong not only with the people around me in the process, but also with those I mentioned earlier who were sources of strength, wisdom and inspiration. When the time came for baptism at the Easter Vigil it was wonderful to have family, friends and community members present to witness this exciting moment. There was a great sense of spiritual depth and communion along with a sense of belonging and joy that enlivened my spirit. I had finally come to the point of “taking the plunge” into this “Ocean” of God and be fully submerged in Him. It felt wonderful, peaceful and welcoming.

From that point forward and to this day I seek ways of bringing to others what I experience in this new relationship and how to become more and more a “wave” from that “Ocean” of God. In doing so, I try to be considerate, compassionate and respectful of other people’s own experiences and beliefs. I am grateful to be in this relationship with God and continue seeking further steps to growth and development as we go forward together.

Lorin Alder is a member of the Rochester Mission House community.





C.P.P.S. MISSION PROJECTS

C.P.P.S Mission Projects is a charity founded by the congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Atlantic Province. Its mission is to spread the Good News that Christ has redeemed us all through the shedding of his Most Precious Blood, by helping those in need.

Since 1976, C.P.P.S. Mission Projects has focused working toward the uplifting of human dignity, and toward better living conditions of Tanzanians. Our missions in Africa support 2.5 million people a year. We help the people and communities we serve lift themselves and their families out of poverty. We partner with donors and the local people to develop solutions to tackle challenges facing them like poverty, lack of access to clean water and education, climate change, economic empowerment, and food security.

We are based in Dodoma-Tanzania and our approach to tackling problems is inspired by the flavor of the Gospel and the Spirituality of the Precious Blood. Our missions give priority to the poor, children, girls and women. May we always be ready to help the poor and the vulnerable. Find us at cppsmissionprojects.ngo

CURIOUS ABOUT MISSIONARY LIFE?

By Fr. Jerome A. Hologá, C.P.P.S.

By shedding his precious blood, Jesus Christ calls all of us to a life of service. He himself told us that “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) Because of his generosity the Church is blessed with a variety of vocations. And so, he chooses some to serve missionaries. “You did not choose me. No, I chose you; to bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (John 15: 16)

The vocation of a missionary flows from the mandate Christ entrusted to his disciples: “Go out into the whole world: proclaim the Good News to all creation.” (Mark 16: 15). It is a radical commitment and a holy abandonment to the will of God which requires willingness to risk everything for the love of Jesus and to face the unknown. As Saint Paul puts it, “we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood offer their lives as a Cup of Blessing. As missionaries who go forth, they recognize and serve Jesus in the suffering “brother or sister, in those who hunger and thirst, who are strangers, naked, sick or in prison.” (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas*) They carry the mission of Jesus, in word and example, to peoples and cultures of the world—an adventure of life which takes them beyond the familiar.

Through the celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, missionaries – together with the community, small or large – worship and give thanks to God who nourishes, forgives, heals, and renews them. You will certainly find them in parish ministry bursting with joy, hope, and compassion.

Over the years missionaries have found themselves called to be agents of development and change among the poor and the marginalized. “True to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, who cited the preaching of the Gospel to the poor as a sign of his mission, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood have never failed to foster the human progress of the people to which they bring faith in Christ. With special care, they devote themselves to the education of children and young people by means of different kinds of schools and vocational training.” (*Populorum Progressio* #12) They also work tirelessly to give access to clean water, health care and food security to the people and communities in desperate need.

Through their care and concern for the total needs of those with and for whom they serve, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood founded C.P.P.S Mission Projects in 1976 to address the many challenges facing the poor and marginalized in Tanzania, East Africa.

Do you want to become a Missionary of the Precious Blood? Come and see! But be aware that Jesus “went to the margins, he gathered followers among the marginal. Because he challenged those at the center, he made enemies among the comfortably complacent. Because he called for justice and redistribution, and blamed respectable people who did nothing, he antagonized many. Because he spoke about service as true leadership, love of neighbor as true Godliness, and laying down of life as true love, he became an embarrassment. Those with the missionary spirit of Jesus should expect nothing else.” (Fr. Anthony Gittins, Chicago)

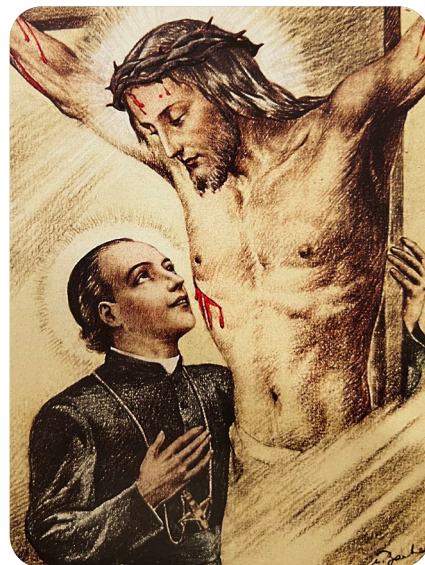
UNIO SANGUIS CHRISTI



Founded in 1851 by the Ven. Giovanni Merlini, third Moderator General of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and approved by Pope Pius IX, the Union serves to promote the spirituality of the Blood of Christ through a variety of activities.

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY

We appreciate any donation to help defray the postage and printing costs of this publication. The suggested annual offering is \$25. Please make cheques payable to Unio Sanguis Christi. Tax receipts are issued in January of each year.

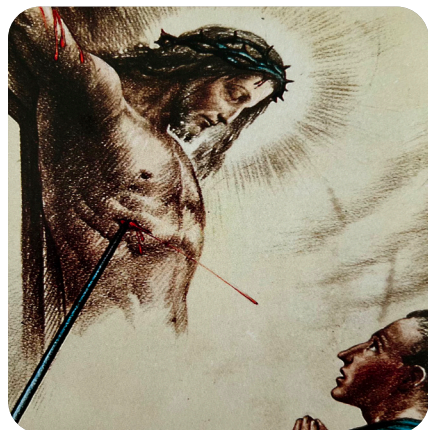


MASS ASSOCIATION

Since 1883 with the approval of Pope Leo XIII the Missionaries of the Precious Blood throughout the world have offered 4000 Masses annually for those enrolled in their Mass Association. Enrollments may be made on behalf of the living and the dead. These may be made in person or by mail at the Shrine of St. Gaspar, 540 St. Clair Ave. W., Toronto ON M6C 1A4. Requests are also accepted by telephone at 416-653-4486 or through the Atlantic Province website. The suggested offering is \$25.00 plus \$4.00

postage if the certificate is mailed.

You may also access the website - preciousbloodatlantic.org - click on Donations for more choices, like requesting a single Mass, a Mass Association or make a donation for spreading the spirituality of the Precious Blood or the work of the Missionaries by completing all the required fields.

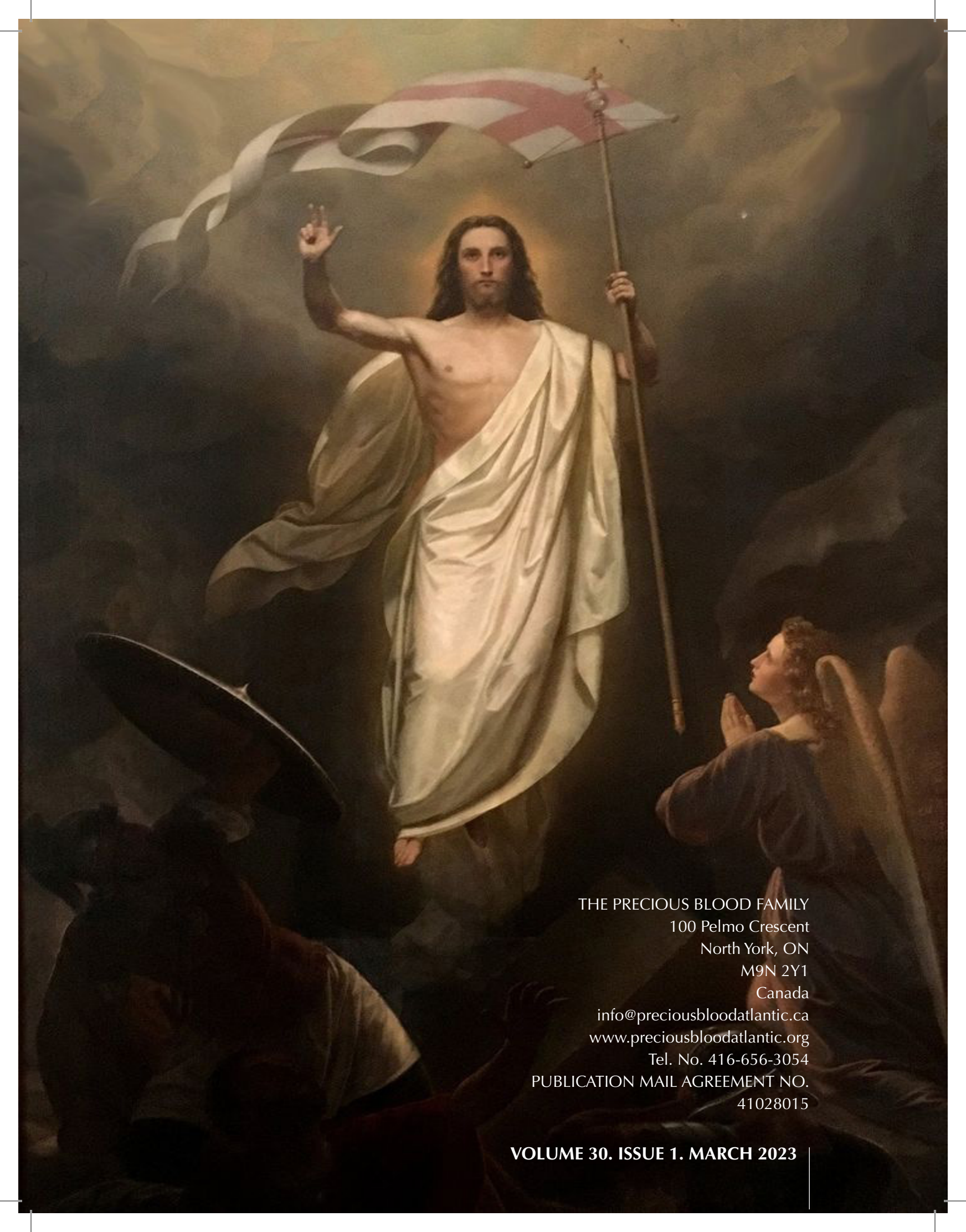


VOCATIONS

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood continue St. Gaspar's Ministry of the Word by preaching renewal and conversion through missions and retreats. We bring that love of God also to parishes, schools, hospitals, and prisons. As missionaries, we work where the Church needs us most and where the

Good News has not been heard. We walk with Jesus by sharing the joys and sufferings of the people with whom we work.

For information, contact Precious Blood Vocations at 416-829-6717 or e-mail alareyab@yahoo.ca.



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