



ST. MARY'S PARISH
8 CHURCH ST.
HOLLISTON, MA 01746

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CHRISTMAS MASSES

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, **CHRISTMAS EVE**

4:00 PM Masses in both the Church and Father Haley Hall (*Hall Mass includes the Christmas Pageant, 4:00 PM parking is difficult, so please plan accordingly*)

5:30 PM Mass in the Church

7:30 PM Mass in the Church

11:00 PM (Midnight) Mass in the Church



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, **CHRISTMAS DAY**

9:30 AM Mass in the Church

11:30 AM Mass in the Church



COOKIE WALK RAISES A RECORD \$3,284.73 FOR THE POOR OF HAITI! Tables groaned under the weight of nearly 3,000 homemade Christmas cookies. They were baked by our Middle School Youth Group teens and sold at the December 7/8 Cookie Walk after all Masses. The funds raised are sent to support the poor of Haiti through Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity there. Thank you to all who took part in this delicious and meaningful annual event!



St. Mary's Parish Newsletter

January, 2025 ~ Volume 51, Number 1



St. Mary's Parish
8 Church Street
Holliston, MA 01746

Rectory: 429-4427

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Music Program: 429-6076

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Parish Email Address: st.marys1870@gmail.com

Website: www.stmarysholliston.com

Mission: "To Know Christ and to Make Him Known!"

CALLED TO SERVE!

Every Fall, St. Mary's puts out a call for new Altar Servers to take the place of those who have graduated High School and left for college. This year nine young people of our parish responded to the call. They attended four, one and a half hour training sessions, learning the names and uses of liturgical articles. They also learned how to set up for Mass, and serve during the Mass itself.

Shown below, all nine were Installed as new Altar Servers at the 9:30 AM Mass on December 8, the Second Sunday of Advent. May their ministry be a great blessing in their lives and upon our worship. Well done!



From left to right we are delighted to welcome New Altar Servers Quinn Duffy, Marcos Silveyra Dodds, William Hayes, Charlie Neitzel, Nolan Browne, Joel Burgett, Ethan Browne, Sarah Cullen, and Soren Bishop.




From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Members of the St. Mary's Parish Family,

Like many of you, I am looking forward to gathering with my family on Christmas Day. I will get to see my parents, siblings, their spouses and my four nieces and two nephews. We are hardly a perfect bunch, but we love each other and are always there for each other despite whatever differences we may have. The last Sunday of 2024, December 29, will be the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Their family was not perfect either. The Holy Family knew trial, fear, struggle and suffering. But they were united and strengthened by their love for each other - a love that included Jesus. Just so, if we make Jesus part of our family, then our human love becomes something more - infused with the love of God Himself. How can you make Jesus more a part of your family life in 2025, so that He might walk with you and bless you in the New Year of His Grace?

On Wednesday, January 1, the Church focuses on a particular member of the Holy Family - Mary, the Mother of God. The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God finds its origin at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. This Council of the Church declared Mary the "theotokos" or "God-bearer," since she bore into the world Jesus Christ in Whom both human and divine natures are fully present. The placement of this Holy Day of Obligation on January 1 is a wonderful blessing for us. What better way to start the New Year than by gathering as a Parish Family around God's table? And what better New Year's Resolution could we make, than to try like Mary to be "bearers" of Christ into the world?

May Christ bless you and your family richly in His love.



Rev. Mark J. Coiro
Pastor



SOLEMNITY OF MARY MOTHER OF GOD

- A Holy Day of Obligation -

Vigil Mass:

Tuesday, December 31, at 5:30 PM

Feast Day Masses:

Wednesday, January 1, at 9:00 AM & 7:00 PM

GIVE A GIFT 2024

Thank you! On the weekend of December 7 & 8, 2024, 703 Christmas gift donations were brought to our church – 28% greater than the 2023 total of 548 gifts and higher than the 13-year average of 576 gifts. Fifteen Knights and several family members, along with eight Religious Education Students, sorted and packed the gifts donated by St. Mary's parishioners. The gifts were then driven into Boston to be distributed to the children of two low income, inner city Catholic Parishes. In these hard economic times, we know these gifts will be a light in the darkness for those who receive them. Well done and thank you to all who were part of this annual Give A Gift effort!



GRAND ANNUAL 2024



Grand Annual Need:	<u>\$150,000.00</u>
Parishioner support received as of December 15, 2024:	<u>\$104,404.00</u>
Parishioner support still needed to reach 2024 Grand Annual goal:	\$ 45,596.00
% of 2024 Grand Annual achieved to date:	70 %
% of St. Mary's families who have now made their Grand Annual gift:	41 %

As the Grand Annual continues, contributions may be placed either in the gold G.A. envelope you received in the mail, or in a separate envelope clearly marked "Grand Annual." G.A. envelopes may be mailed to 8 Church Street or dropped through the Rectory Office Door Mail-slot. Any collection basket passed at Mass may also be used.

As explained in the special mailing to all parishioners, the \$150,000 goal will fund staff salaries, the Church Skylight Replacement, the Parish Center Kitchen Repairs and Renovations, the New Church Bells installed last summer, and long delayed Rectory Repairs. Your generous support will assure the financial health of our parish continues. Thank you for your support of this most important annual collection!

NB This year, no one received the Grand Annual Mailing before the 2024 Kick Off Weekend of November 9/10. And many still did not have it as of December 1. Given that it was mailed out First Class by Our Sunday Visitor on November 1, this has been very frustrating for all. We can only apologize for the inconvenience. In light of this delay, Our Sunday Visitor has re-sent the entire mailing to all parishioners. They did this at their own expense, and by now the new mailing should have been received by everyone. Thank you as always for your faithful and generous stewardship.



St. Mary's Parish Middle School Youth Group

Next Meeting is Sunday, January 5, from 6:30 - 8 PM, Welcome!

GRADE SEVEN BINGO SERVICE TRIP: Each year, the three grades of St. Mary's Middle School Youth Group take turns running a fun BINGO event for the residents of Timothy Daniel's Nursing Home. On Friday, November 22, it was the Seventh Grade's turn. The kids introduced themselves to the residents, learning where they were from and their former occupations. Most then helped the players keep track of their BINGO cards, while a few called out the numbers and passed out prizes to the winners. According to the residents and staff, St. Mary's always has the best prizes! At the end of the event, several residents gave the prizes they had won to the teens who had helped them. It was a reminder that the residents value this time with the young people far more than the items they win. God bless you!





St. Mary's Parish Middle School Youth Group

Next Meeting is Sunday, January 5, from 6:30 - 8 PM, Welcome!

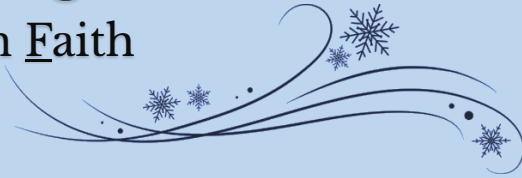
CELTICS TRIP: On Monday, November 25, the Celtics took down the Clippers 126 - 94. And 85 MSYG Teens were at the TD Garden to cheer them on! Two buses packed with our Youth Group Members headed into Boston at 5 PM, allowing time for traffic and grabbing some food at the Garden before the game started at 7:30 PM. All wore matching kelly-green baseball caps to help everyone spot and stay with our group. This trip was long in the planning, as Fr. Mark started working to get so many tickets way back in June. It was all worth it to see Jayson Tatum score 20 points and the Boston Celtics do their stuff! The Clippers did make a decent effort in the third quarter, using a 22 - 8 run to reduce Boston's lead to 14. But Boston made its next three 3's to help push the lead back above 20. From that point on a Celtics victory seemed inevitable. Thank you to all our wonderful adult chaperones who made this trip possible. Go Celtics!





St. Mary's High School Youth Group

Teens Gather In Faith



Save these 2025 Dates!

Sunday, January 12 – T.G.I.F. Meeting

Sunday, February 23 – T.G.I.F. Meeting

Friday, February 28 – FAMILY BINGO NIGHT

Sunday, March 16 – T.G.I.F. Meeting

Sunday, April 13 – T.G.I.F. EGGTRAVAGANZA

Sunday, April 13 – T.G.I.F. Meeting

Sunday, May 4 – T.G.I.F. Meeting

Saturday/Sunday May 10 & 11 -

Mother's Day Flower Sales at ALL MASSES

Sunday, June 1 – T.G.I.F. Potluck Celebration

Saturday, June 7 – Shrine Car Wash 10:30 – 3:00 PM

Saturday, June 21 - Church Car Wash 10-30 – 3:00 PM

2025 MISSISSIPPI MISSION TRIP

Sunday, July 27 – Saturday August 2, 2025

**UNDERLINED DATES ARE FUNDRAISERS
FOR THE MISSION TRIP!**

**JOIN US FOR OUR
NEXT MEETING!**

**Sunday, January 12
7:00 – 8:45 PM**

Come deepen your relationship with Christ while connecting with friends.

Whether you're new to T.G.I.F. or have been attending for years, there's a place for you here!

Let's grow in our faith together and build lasting friendships rooted in Christ.

****All high schoolers are welcome!****

We are looking forward to Friday, January 24, when we embark on our trip to Nashoba Valley's Snow Tubing Park!

Some T.G.I.F. trips are in the works! Top Golf, Boda Borg, Fr. Bill's Shelter and Mall Scavenger Hunt.





Troop 14 Holliston

Boy Scouts of America
St. Mary's Parish * January, 2025

Meetings: Monday Nights 7:00 - 8:30 PM

Contact: Chris Baribeau, Scoutmaster
508-579-4357

Email: Troop14Holliston@yahoo.com

If interested in joining Troop 14, contact the Scoutmaster. It is an ideal organization for boys in sixth grade or above.

The Troop meets weekly during the school year, Mondays from 7 - 8:30 PM in the Lower Church.

NEXT UP

- January 25, winter hike and campout at the picturesque Lonesome Lake and hut in Franconia Notch, NH.
- February 2, Annual Pancake Breakfast fundraiser in Father Haley Hall.



ANNUAL TURKEY ROAST CAMPOUT AND SCOUTING FOR FOOD: Over the first weekend of November, Troop 14 held a Turkey Roast and Campout at the Holliston Sportsmen's Association. This annual event was a fun weekend that included campfires, cooking, games and supervised activities such as orienteering, axe throwing, and clay target shooting. Cub Scouts from Packs across town joined us on Saturday for the day's activities and the evening campfire, songs, and campout. The weekend activities were finished off with a turkey dinner on Saturday evening that included the Scouts and their families.



Early Saturday morning, Scouts participated in a Scouting for Food service event where they dropped off door hangers around town requesting donations for the Holliston Pantry Shelf. Scouts collected more than 350 bags of donated food and supplies the following Saturday. Thank you, Holliston, for your pantry shelf donations!



DAY HIKE AT SHATTERACK AND TEKOA:

On November 23, twenty-five Troop 14 Scouts and Leaders completed an eleven-mile hike that started with a summit of Mt. Shatterack located in Montgomery, Massachusetts. The next summit was 1,121-foot Mt. Tekoa which offered a dramatic, rocky high point overlooking the Westfield River Gorge at the eastern edge of the Berkshire plateau in the towns of Montgomery and Russell. Scouts capped off this day-long hike with a refueling stop at one of the few remaining Friendly's Cafes in Westfield, Massachusetts.



A NEW EAGLE SCOUT! St. Mary's Parishioner Eli Hopke, of Boy Scout Troop 367 in Medway, celebrated his Eagle Court of Honor on Sunday, November 24. The Eagle Scout rank is the highest achievement in the Boy Scouts of America. It is a symbol of a Scout's leadership skills, dedication, and commitment to serving their community. Eli is a Sophomore at Bishop Feehan, serves as a Senior Altar Server at St. Mary's, and has served his Troop as an Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, Crew Leader for the Troop's trip to St. Thomas Sea Base last summer, and Jr. Assistant Scout Master. Eli has earned the Ad Altare Dei Award, the 50 Miler, Bronze and Gold Palms, and 32 merit badges. Last Summer, he served as a lifeguard at BSA Camp Yawgoog in Rhode Island (where he plans to return this summer). For his Eagle project, Eli led friends and Scouts from Troop 367 and Troop 14 in the building of four picnic tables (with attached benches) for Sparhawk Academy in Millis. He continues to serve Troop 367 and looks forward to many more amazing adventures!



Knights of Columbus

St. Mary's Council #14224 January, 2025

"In Service to One, In Service to All."



DECEASED MEMBERS MASS AND INSTALLATION OF 2025 OFFICERS - SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3:

Our Council observed our deceased members at the 11:30 AM Mass. After the Mass, the Council installed our 2025 slate of officers in the church. Father Mark and State Activity Chairman Knight Michael Kerrigan conducted the installation. After the installation, attending families had a Sunday meal in Father Haley Hall.

RECYCLING EVENT, COUNCIL AND THE GREEN TEAM - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9:

The Council, along with Girl Scout Troop 64082, raised \$6,000 that was split between the Council and the Girl Scouts. The Council thanks all who helped and those who cleaned out their homes of recycling "junk".

SECOND ANNUAL ROAD TOUR EVENT - SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17:

Even though we competed with a Patriots game, 18 cars participated in the tour of Holliston Veterans memorials around town. After the tour, we gathered in Father Haley Hall to complete the "test" of what we learned while consuming refreshments. Representatives from Holliston VFW and American Legion Posts spoke on veteran's needs. Thanks to many local business sponsors, the Council presented a \$3,400 donation check to "Thanks 2 Yanks" Veteran's Charity. We had three winning teams that received an "Eagle Trophy". Knight Paul Saulnier coordinated the event.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE FOR 2025: The Knights of Columbus is the largest Catholic Fraternal organization in the world with "...more than 2.1 million members in over 16,800 local councils globally" [from August 16 PILOT pg.7]. For membership information contact Grand Knight Albert Scaramella at 508-561-0584 OR ajscaramella@comcast.net OR you can now join ON-LINE by going to the Supreme K of C website kofc.org/joinus. Our Council respects members limited time but needs new members to share our faith journey as Catholic men.

PARISH CRECHE SET UP - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30:

The Knights did their usual awesome job setting up Saint Mary's Creche early on the first weekend of Advent. All is now in place except for the figure of Baby Jesus. He will assume the place of honor on Christmas Eve. May He also arrive then in our hearts, bringing His gifts of peace and hope to all people of good will!

*"Arise, all ye nobles and peasants;
Mary invites all, rich and poor,
just and sinners, to enter the cave
of Bethlehem, to adore and to kiss
the feet of her new-born Son...Let
us enter; let us not be afraid."*

- St. Alphonsus Liguori:



Knights of Columbus

St. Mary's Council #14224 January, 2025



"In Service to One, In Service to All."

MONTHLY ROSARY - WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15: The next Rosary will be Wednesday, January 15, in the church at 7:00 PM. Any and all persons are welcome to attend. As Pope Saint John Paul II explained, the repeated prayers in the rosary help us get more in touch with the deepest desires in our souls for God.

COUNCIL SPONSORING RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE - SATURDAY, JANUARY 18: On Saturday, January 18, in St. Mary's Father Haley Hall, the Council will sponsor its annual Red Cross Blood Drive. Hours are from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM. To schedule an appointment, contact 1-800-REDCROSS or visit <https://www.redcrossblood.org/> and search by zip code (01746) in the "Find a Blood Drive" field. Your blood donation will help the Council cross the 1000 pints donated plateau with this drive. Questions or further information? Contact Council Blood Drive Coordinator Rodman Burgett at 508-653-6130.

Quick
Blood Facts
to Get You **STARTED:**

One donation can save up to **3** Lives

More than
1.2K
donations are needed **EVERY DAY** for local hospitals.

Only **10%**
of eligible individuals actually donate.

Every **2** seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood.

Save a life. Give blood. Spread the word.

HOW BLOOD IS USED: Blood has no substitute, but is needed every two seconds to treat and improve a number of health issues and conditions, including:

- Cancer treatments,
- Blood loss during childbirth,
- Trauma-related blood loss,
- Babies born prematurely,
- Blood disorders, and
- Surgery complications.



DONATE BLOOD

K of C FREE THROW CHALLENGE - JANUARY 25: Once again the Council will sponsor the Free Throw Challenge for all 10 to 17 year-old boys and girls at the Holliston High School gym on Saturday, January 25. Register at the gym. Parental approval is required for all players. Several Holliston boys and girls in past Challenges have advanced to the State Finals and some have won State Champ in their age group. For detailed questions contact Knight Don Marden at 508-429-1363 or 508-361-4963 or batterup2@aol.com.





Inspiration & encouragement for your spiritual journey



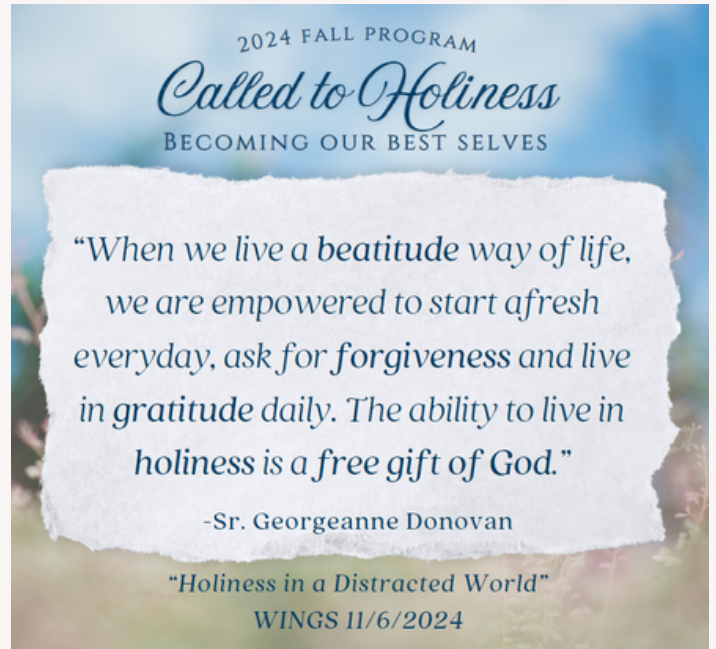
Fall Program *"Called to Holiness – Becoming our Best Selves"* Recap

WINGS kicked off its 25th Anniversary year at St. Mary's with a Fall Program centered on the universal call to holiness. A scripture verse from (1 Peter) *"Be holy, because I am holy."* provided inspiration for the speakers and weekly topics.

Members grew in knowledge and faith thanks to the encouragement and inspiration of our wonderful speakers who presented on the church's teaching on holiness. One member commented, *"We are called to evangelize and reveal God's love through our daily lives."*

We explored the importance of discerning our own path using our God-given gifts, drew inspiration from the Saints, and discussed how living a "beatitude way of life" can help us grow in holiness despite the many distractions of our world.

View these extraordinary programs by sending an email to stmaryswingssecretary@gmail.com and ask for the link.



Save the Date! Winter Program: January 22 – February 26

Save the date for our Winter Program beginning January 22 on Wednesdays at 10 AM – 11:15 AM. Meetings are held on Zoom and in Fr. Haley Hall.

Continuing the theme of holiness, we will focus on spiritual growth through the study and sharing scripture. The speakers and schedule will be available in the coming weeks. Women of all ages are welcome.

Free babysitting is available!

Contact Us to Join

 stmaryswingssecretary@gmail.com

 scan for Facebook



Religious Education Notes

FIRST CONFESSION PRACTICES ~ JANUARY 6, 7, & 8: On Monday, January 6, Tuesday, January 7 and Wednesday, January 8 the Second Grade children will have a review for their First Penance. Parents should bring their children into the church promptly at 4:15 PM on one of the three days to practice. On Friday, January 10, at 6:30 PM and Saturday, January 11, at 11:00 AM the Second Grade children will have the Sacrament of Penance in the church. Parents must bring their children to their assigned day and be checked in at the Washington Street main entrance doors. Please pray for the children that they will seek this sacrament of Christ' love, forgiveness and grace as they prepare for their First Communion.

GRADE 6 VOCATION SESSION ~ MONDAY, JANUARY 13: All Grade 6 Sunday and Tuesday students will take part in this special meeting on the Catholic Church from 4-5:30 PM in Fr. Haley Hall. The students are studying the Old Testament Scriptures learning how God revealed himself through the ages with many Covenants. Today we live with the new covenant given by Jesus Christ in His Priesthood and Kingship. The students will be able to form an understanding how the early priests in the Temple at the time of Jesus worshipped God and how many of the traditions of using incense, prayer, symbols, and vestments are similar. The Ark of the Covenant in the Church today is Christ's living presence in the Tabernacles around the world.

ANGELS MUST BE AMUSED BY FOOD

Humans need food to survive, but we also use food to welcome. We use it to celebrate. When someone is grieving, we bring food. We associate specific foods with holidays. It may be fish and Christmas Eve, or ham and Christmas Day. There are candy canes and eggnog and gingerbread. Easter may not feel like Easter without Easter Bread, and of course, there's cake for a birthday. Something special? It "takes the cake." Not a big deal? It's "a nothing burger." You may associate the memory of your grandmother with those butter cookies she always had on the counter, just in case you dropped by...a bite-sized I-love-you.

Angels would have watched God feed Israel with manna. An angel fed Hagar in the desert, and later, Isaiah. Revelation envisions the saints in Heaven at a wedding feast. The only miracle recorded in all four Gospels is Jesus multiplying bread to feed the crowd. Then, at the end, He becomes bread for our souls. Therefore, angels must be amused by food. Celebration and sustenance and sanctification: it's all those things for humans. And angels don't need it at all. *(Reflection submitted by Parishioner Jane Lebak).*

THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S

The Saint Mary's Church Bell Tower contains one original metal bell, which strangely is unnamed. Usually, bells are "baptized" and have a Saint's name and scribe somewhere on their surface. Saint Mary's Bell is currently ringable only by manually rotating the double wheels to which it is attached in the tower. The bells we hear ringing over Holliston are electronic and were installed just this past summer to replace the old electronic bell system which had been installed 30 years previously and failed in June. The new bell system is being paid for from the 2024 Grand Annual currently underway.



The primary purpose of our church bells is to summon the faithful to prayer. To this end they ring out a few minutes before all regular weekday and weekend Masses, the exception being the 7:30 AM Sunday Mass out of consideration for the neighbors. The bells ring out a joyful peel at the end of a wedding, announcing the beginning of a new life to Holliston and to the world. Likewise, the bells sound a solemn toll at the end of Funeral Masses, asking prayers for a soul on its final journey to God. Finally, Saint Mary's bells play three hymns every day after the Noon Angelus, and then three more hymns at 6 PM to inspire reflection and prayer.

At exactly 2 PM on Saturday, December 7, 2024, the bells of St. Mary's, Holliston rang out in joy to mark the reopening of Notre Dame de Paris at that same time. This reopening followed the devastating fire of 2019. Notre Dame is a wonder of our Catholic heritage and a jewel of faith for the Church of France. The USCCB encouraged all Catholic Churches to ring their bells in celebration of this moment of renewal and joy and to express our communion with the Church of France



Stepping Up in Faith

By Deacon John Barry

How the last three steps of the 12-Step Program, and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola can help us on our journey toward holiness.

Over the previous few Newsletters we have illustrated how the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the Twelve Step Program of Addiction Recovery are closely related. In this article we review the last three steps, and how practicing them can be an exercise that leads us to holiness.

Step Ten: *Illumination.* The tabernacle in our parish church has the inscription “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus” (“Holy, holy, holy”). I often call people’s attention to that word, because it describes perfectly the universal call to holiness described in *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI). The word *sanctus* has two syllables, or two halves. The first is “sanct”, from which derives the words sanctify and sanctity; the qualities required for saintliness, and the second half, which is “us.” Many of us go about the first half of our lives looking at sainthood as a distant path reserved for a select few. But maturity in the spiritual life comes when we recognize that God is calling each of us as individuals into exactly that role: His unique pathway to holiness.

In order for us to achieve true holiness, we have to gain purity of heart. Becoming aware of the choices we make and discerning which of those choices lead us to a closer relationship with Christ is a critical step in this process, and a direct component of the *Illumination & Self-giving* phase of the Spiritual Exercises. Step Ten of the Twelve Steps mirrors it: “Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong to promptly admit it.” Jesus came to testify to the truth [John 18:37], and as His followers we are called to embrace it. Having the humility to admit our imperfections and the courage to address them is all our Lord is asking in calling us to a life of holiness. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God,” He says. [Matthew 5:8]

Step Eleven: *Conversion.* This step helps us to convert from self-absorption to spiritual awareness. It helps us to focus our attention more in the direction of God. “Through prayer and meditation,” it states, we are to “improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” This is the call to discipleship, and the first two steps of the Spiritual Exercises: “Recogniz(e) the call of Christ and the desire and capacity to be His disciple,” and to do it “in spiritual poverty, self-emptying, and humility.” By spiritual poverty, Saint Ignatius means *kenosis*, which is an emptying of ourselves in order for God to fill us with His life and His Love. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus tells us [Matthew 5:3]. *Kenosis* is the true and only way to answer the call to holiness.

How can we, as imperfect creatures “be perfect, as (our) heavenly Father is perfect?” [Matthew 5:48] By letting go, emptying ourselves, and allowing God to fill us with His Presence, we can become true apostles. As Catholics, isn’t that our mission after all; to truly become, not what, but Who we eat?

Step Twelve: *The Great Commission.* “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations” Jesus tells us. This is the Great Commission, and every one of His disciples is entrusted with it. In order for our evangelization effort to be effective it must be authentic. Having the humility to embrace each of these steps individually, we can become aware of our flaws as imperfect humans, and arrive at this final step with the confidence and serenity to move forward in Christ’s company, knowing that He is with us always.

The last of the Twelve Steps of AA state that “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps,” we are to “carry this message to (those who are attached to all that is not God), and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” Likewise, Saint Ignatius reminds us to be prepared to “bring the graces of the exercises into the everyday world.” Each of us is given the Great Commission as Christians, and it is God’s expectation that we will carry it out, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Embrace these steps and satisfy your thirst for holiness, and the Master’s thirst for you.

Reach Deacon John & Diane Barry at (508) 794-9128. Learn more about iTHIRST at <https://ithirstinitiative.org>.

Cross Walk:

The Light in the Darkness

Squinting, I saw a hint of light peeking through the blinds. After a long stretch, my 'back alarm' signaled it was time to wake up. Wrapping my robe around me, I shuffled down the hall. Everything in the house was so dark, bathed in dull gray tones. My blue living room carpet appeared drab, charcoal. The painting above my fireplace, normally ripe with tropical color, was ashen.

Turning into my kitchen, the origin of the bedroom light, sparkled through the window over the sink. I took in a nice slow breath and smiled. A whisper of wind tickled the black silhouettes of barren trees into a sunrise dance. It was only 6 AM, and already I had been given the gift of a new day.



My thoughts turned to my need for inspiration for today's writing task. It was time to get back to my Cross Walks. The kind words of parishioners had been nudging me that it was time.

I pulled out a chair near the sink and cupping my hands around my warm tea, savored the silence. Watching and listening for the inspiration He had for me in this morning's sunrise. I leaned toward the window, taking it all in and asked God what He needed me to say.

"The light..." I heard, "talk about the light."

With each passing moment the light grew, changing the sky to soft peaches and blues. The gray drained away as each object in my home reacted to the light and welcomed back its color. Details, curves, and texture came alive. I felt like the wisemen, drawn to the far off growing light, mesmerized, unable to pull my eyes away.

This past year, darkness fell on my family in the form of some unexpected bad news.



My beloved husband of 43 years, Scott, had beaten prostate cancer... so we thought. Then in October of 2023, we got the news

it had metastasized to his bones. If that wasn't enough...the same day, my daughter was rushed to the hospital for an emergency induction with her first born son. It was overwhelming, to say the least.

After we got the news, I couldn't focus. The raw truth had punched me in the gut. Everything that had seemed so important, didn't really matter anymore. I felt like I was floating in a surreal gray limbo, of sorts. It was all I could do to catch my breath and release the constant tears. This author and poet, who wrote every single day, had no desire to write or create. My muse had crawled in a hole and was not coming out.

For the next month, we kept Scott's news secret because my daughter's blood pressure was still high, and we didn't want to make matters worse. Sacrificial love. Knowing we had no choice but to tell our children, was breaking our hearts. We had spent our whole lives trying to protect them, but there was no way to save them from this difficult truth. So, in November we told each of our children and had many good cries. Getting back to our normal felt impossible.

One day at Mass I wondered what Jesus did when life got overwhelming? He stepped away, went into the wilderness and filled himself back up with silence, prayer and close friends.

**When Jesus was grieving
the death of his cousin, John:**

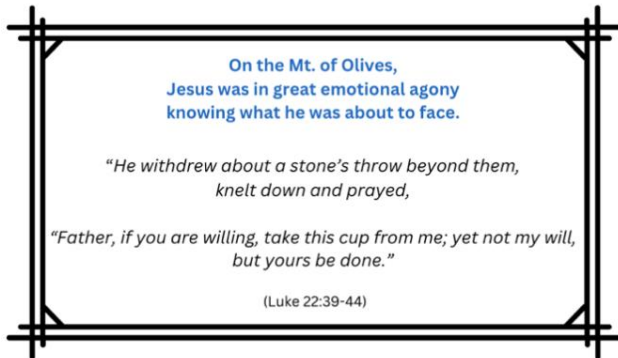
*"When Jesus heard what had happened,
he withdrew by boat privately,
to a solitary place."
(Matt 14:13)*

I thought to myself, if God Himself could step away when life got overwhelming, why couldn't I?



So, for the last year, I stepped back from my Cross Walk column, taking the time, I needed for myself, for Scott and for my family. We soaked up our children and grandchildren, making loads of memories filled with laughter. Between doctor appointments, we read many novels, escaping into someone else's story, and spent much time out in nature savoring the stillness and cathedral pines.

At Mass, seeing the cross took on deeper meaning, as we carried ours. Scott and I stumbled through sorrow, denial, and anger and began together, trying to find our way to acceptance.



When I hear those words, "... take this cup away from me." I relate to Christ's humanity in a way I never have before. Like Him, I jostle between, complete faith and trust - *Thy Will Be Done* and desperately praying for a miracle - for the 'cup' to be taken away from us.

Although my desperation, denial and anger have softened, my heart still cries out for a miracle.

I do believe with all my heart, that if it is God's will, He will only need to touch my husband, and he will be cured. Every week at Mass, during the Prayers of the Faithful, when we pray for the sick, I imagine God's merciful hands reaching down and cradling Scott and imagine what a joyful day that would be.

I tear up thinking about being the crazy woman you'd see on the evening news, shouting from the highest mountain of God's goodness and mercy.

But...perhaps, I don't need to wait for a miracle to see where His light has broken through the darkness in my life. Maybe it is time to shout from the highest mountain right now, for the blessings that have come from this cross.

- Somehow the volume on the "I love you's" we sprinkle more into each day, have become louder.
- The colors of spring crocus and fall leaves seemed more vivid this past year.



- Scott and I believe that while we were given this cross to bear, God also gave us Ronan, two days after we got the news. He knew in His wisdom we needed Ronan. His sweet presence has made all the difference—he has tipped the scales toward joy for us.
- Our children and grandchildren are well and thriving.
- We are filled with gratitude for every day we are blessed with.

Though Scott is stable and doing very well, we have not had our miracle...yet. While I still hope and pray it is in God's great plan, I am finding peace in the words that show up in the Bible more than any other words, "Do not be afraid," and "Praise God."

As December 21 approaches (the winter solstice) God gives us the gift of 3 extra minutes per day of sunlight. The change is subtle at first, but soon you begin to notice that you're not making dinner in the dark anymore. The increasing light brings joy and hope. I know, there are those, like me, who have found themselves in darkness this winter for many reasons. I pray that you will see all the many ways that Christ's light shines in your life, through family, friends, strangers and that little child in Bethlehem.

Walking in His name, Cathy Stenquist