

# Saint Monica Messenger

Issue 37 March 2016

He  
Has  
Risen

## My Journey to Catholicism

By Sammy Sharp

My journey began being raised as a Non-Catholic. I did attend church regularly. You could say I was at church every time the door was open. I attended Sunday church services morning and night, Wednesday prayer service and weekly bible study. These early years have proved to be most useful. I truly believe that we are all striving to accomplish the same thing, eternal life.

What brought the need for change in me? Soon after I graduated from Junior College I got married. My bride to be was and is a Catholic. I attended preparatory classes and promised to bring my family up in the Catholic faith. After forty-five years of attending Masses with my wife and raising our daughter in the Catholic faith, I came to the conclusion that there has been something missing. Being Non Catholic, I could not participate in the most important part of being a Christian, receiving the Eucharist, the Body of Christ.

What I have found is that going through the RCIA process, I have gained so much insight as to what Catholicism is about. Do I know it all? No, but I have a good starting point.

My early experiences in the Non-Catholic church was that during Easter I would go to church, sing songs, have a service, come home, eat and hide Easter eggs. By participating in the RCIA program, I have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the true sacrifice that was made so that I could have eternal life. By participating in church activities as well as the weekly lessons I have come to appreciate how the Catholic Church ties all the events together, one reading transfers to the other and builds to the crucifixion and resurrection.

This Lenten season has given me the opportunity to experience what it means to sacrifice, give up something you normally would not give up, do without a couple days a week, walk the stations of the Cross, feel what it must have been like for Mary to see her son on the cross, feel the pain when he died for us. This experience has helped me better internalize and verbalize my faith.

I have truly gained a world of insight and understanding in my journey to becoming Catholic. My journey has been an easy one, thanks to the help, guidance, understanding and love shown to me from fellow parishioners, friends and family. I have been truly blessed by God and in return I pray that I can be a voice for Christ and walk closer to Him.

I hope in some way my story has inspired someone to take this journey.



### 2016: Rite of Election

Front Row: Iris Eigenrauch, Sammy Sharp, Bishop Felipe Estévez, S.T.D., Fr. Amar Nagothu MSFS, Amanda Phillips;

Back Row: Rosalie Soulis, Karen Lee, RCIA Coordinator, Ricky Webb, Lee Mullenax, Daniel Shepard.

**RCIA** stand for Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. It is a process where those of us who want to become Catholic learn about the doctrines of the Catholic Church. It is a seven month process where much of the basic Catholic beliefs are taught by a team composed of parishioners.

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Day of Reflection January 23, 2016



## Experiencing the Year of Mercy

Fr. Kiran Medipalli, Pastor of St. Ambrose, spent the day with us explaining what the *Year of Mercy* should mean to us. By the end of the day, we understood that this year is to be an opportunity for us to spend more time in prayer, so we can truly listen to God and do as He wants us to do using His virtues of love, forgiveness and mercy.

Fr. Kiran stressed that we need to pray always, as when **Cardinal Dolan said, "As you breathe, you should pray."** We also need to that time for quiet prayer, "our mountain experience". Like Jesus, we can escape in order to listen to God, contemplate, and then we can rejoin the community and act as the Lord wishes.

Fr. Kiran interpreted **Pope Francis' statement, "Parishes are to become Islands of Mercy in a sea of indifference"**. He told us that "Islands of Mercy" are created through Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. He discussed these works both biblically and how we can live them out in our daily actions.

While Fr. Kiran explained the Spiritual Works, he helped us to understand the "New Evangelization". He simply stated that we, as in all Christians are responsible to reach out to those who live apart from Christ and His gospel, therefore, we need to reaffirm a personal decision for Christ. We are to use all methods and technology to communicate our Lord's Word, love and mercy. We are to feel like St. Peter when he cried out, "Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel" (1Cor 9:16). Fr. Kiran left us stressing, as St. John Paull II urged, "the Holy Spirit is the key to make Evangelization effective., so we must live in a daily relationship with Christ".

## Parish Mission: Invitation to Mercy

Fr. Justin Okoro led us on a three night mission March 6th - 8th. He not only led us with his wisdom but also with his wonderful deep Nigerian voice.



During the Mission, Father gave us lessons from the Old Testament and the New Testament. He waited as we all flipped through our bibles to read different passages that he would then interpret. He stressed to us, to seek and hold hard to the truth. In order to distinguish the truth, we must always seek the kingdom of God first, for we are anointed. The truth should become our armor and never give our faith to the devil. The Lord never promised us that the road would be easy, so He continuously gives us strength by recharging and reactivating our fortitude and discernment through the Eucharist. Fr. Justin gave us compass to the road of Truth. We will know if we are truly seeking God and His ways by if we bring others to God.

On the second night's theme was "Christians are People of the Heart. We should be constant even when we are surrounded with distractions and excuses". He told us, "We need to be sure that we are not just eating, but we and our families are being fed." He explained that, we must nourish the seed of faith that has been planted, and let it grow; not until we decide that it has grown enough, but until God says that it is enough. This is true not only for our faith, but our amount of giving and our love for others. Father instructed us, that when going beyond comfort becomes hard for us, are the times when we need to pray harder and ask the Lord for mercy. This could even mean liberating prisoners, those who we have imprisoned in our hearts by keeping historical records of their sins. These offenses should not be held on to by us, but given to God. Fr. Justin reminded us, "To follow God is to loose everything and there is no looking back with complaints or judgments". We must do things for Christ, not for worldly recognition for we will surly be disappointed.

On the third night, Fr. Justin prepared us for our reconciliations. He reminded us about our sins, that like children, we thought we got away and think we don't need to confess. But we are wrong. God knows. So would we like to speak of these sins now or at our death. We have to give it all up to be a disciple of Christ.

Before Fr. Justin left us, he contrasted the lives in Africa to America. He described that poor in Africa is women carrying water on their heads in order to have water in their homes. Father reminded us that we live in a very generous nation. We must do our part not to let our country fail; for the whole world will fall without the generosity from the United States.

# To Renew Our Hearts

## The Eucharist, A Gift of Love for Others



Listening to those who went to the 2016 Eucharistic Congress would make anyone regret not attending. Our parishioners who went on Saturday were moved by the beautiful

Mass where thousands gathered to celebrate the Word and the Eucharist, which began with a very colorful procession with all the banners from the different parishes and diocesan ministries. Living in Palatka, a town, even the county, where Catholics are the minority, being at the Congress was like going home and being hugged by loved ones.

Though our parishioners only went to the Adult General Session, they were confident that the other sessions were also good, just by the sounds and energy the group felt while passing in the hallway.



His Eminence Oscar Cardinal Rodriguez Maradiaga, S.D.B., Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, CA, set the tone for all the Saturday speakers by speaking of the Eucharist as a **"Gift of love for others which should renew our hearts each time we receive for we are becoming the Eucharist"**. It is a gift that is freely given. He stressed that spiritual life is not like cocaine, just to make us feel good. We must take action. Since the Eucharist has been given and received, it can demand that those receiving must also become the Eucharist and give and serve others.

Cardinal even compared us to Mother Mary, like her, we must welcome and take what is given, the Eucharist, and make the Lord into flesh by our love and actions.



Fr. Richard Ho Lung, M.O.P., Founder of Missionaries of the Poor in Jamaica, reminded us that we are led to be saints. He should know after meeting Mother

Theresa and receiving from her the facilities where the M.O.P. serves the poor in Jamaica. He stressed that, **"Christ's hands are our hands. Christ's mind is our minds..."** It is the Evil One who divides our brotherhood, our one family." Fr. Ho Lung also treated them with a couple songs that he wrote that were sung by Missionaries of the Poor. The crowd enjoyed the energy and delight listening and watching Fr. Ho Lung dance to the music, though most attendees probably did not notice that Fr. Ho Lung has a difficulty in walking or standing for long periods of time, but only by the Holy Spirit can he share such gifts. (Fr. Amar shared this insight, since he has known Fr. Ho Lung since Fr. Amar was in the sixth grade and has concelebrated with him on multiple occasions.)



Fr. Mitch Pacwa, S.J., Best Selling Author, educator and a Host on EWTN compared Catholics to Mary Magdalene when she said, **"My Lord, I do not know where they have put Him."**

He explained that Catholics, like Mary, must be saying the same, as we see some who try to water down our faith and take the attention away of our Lord. Two examples are the odd places we find Adoration being held, and modern hymns that stress our accomplishments and love, instead of praising the Lord. He recalled biblical history of when the **Lord's people moved God away from** being the center of their lives, (the ten lost tribes of Israel). Fr. Pacwa then led the crowd on a biblical journey of why the Mass is what it is: our life with Christ, our sacrifice with His brought to the cross and then resurrected for our eternal salvation. He proved this by defining the Hebrew translations of the words used by Jesus and in the Eucharistic Prayer. One of the profound understandings that he explained was the crucifixion and resurrection during the Eucharistic Prayer. When the bread and wine are consecrated

separately into the Body and Blood through the Priest, a person of Christ, our Lord is dead for the body and blood are separate. But before His sacrifice is received, the Priest breaks off a piece of the Body and places it into the chalice, thereby reuniting the Body and Blood and **raises them to heaven for Christ's and** our resurrection, for this is the New Covenant!



Dale Recinella, Catholic Correctional Chaplain to Florida's Death Row and Solitary Confinement witnessed the conversions and the awe and thankfulness of those

on Death Row when they received the Eucharist for the first time. He recalled that everyone in the room, saw that one prisoner actually had a glow about him, while yet another **could only continuously say, "Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus!"** Mr. Recinella wondered how the world would be, if all who received our Lord Jesus Christ, really and substantially, had this prisoner's appreciation for our God coming down to Earth to sacrifice Himself for us.

Even after our minds were opened by these wonderful speakers, it was **Friday's Stations of the Cross** that those who went Friday night said made their weekend. Those who spoke about this experience have been to many Stations over their lives, but this one was so amazing and intense it brought them to tears. The characters were phenomenal along with the backgrounds on the screen and the soundtracks. They felt like they were there, on Calvary. This presentation of the Stations was so mesmerizing that with the thousands that were there, the only thing that could be heard besides the narration, was the weeping of the crowd.





## St. Monica Supports Our Troops

By Daniel Shepard

This year before Lent, Karen Lee decided to form a group of people to make knotted military Rosaries for our troops serving overseas. She named the group the "Mary Rosary Makers" and asked Daniel Shepard to teach the group how to make the Rosaries, using the instructions from Seatofwisdom.net. The group worked thru Lent and made 103 Rosaries, each individually packed with a label that says,

*"As you pray this Rosary, know that we are keeping you in our prayers, St Monica Catholic Church".*

During Mass Friday morning, Father Amar blessed the Rosaries and asked everyone to pray for those who protect us, that they might also be protected.

The Rosaries will be sent to the Archdiocese for Military Services, Washington, D.C. From there the Rosaries will be distributed to Catholic personnel overseas as well as patients in VA Medical Centers.

## Small Christian Communities Pack Blessing Bags



One of the projects our SCCs are doing during this Year of Mercy is packing "Blessing Bags". Each bag is a one to two gallon Ziploc bag filled with everyday necessities for the homeless.

Items include travel size personal products, socks, quarters for their laundry and few non-perishable food items. These bags are then

given to our Parish Office and St. Monica Food Pantry and the VA for the homeless who visit there or kept in parishioners' cars ready to be given out when someone is in need.

For more info: ThriftyNorthwest Mom.com

## Thank You for Your Generosity



Thank you to all the donations for the new albs for the Altar Servers. Your generosity was so great that we were able to buy all the albs from your donations.

Picture was taken when Fr. Amar was blessing the Altar Servers who were present.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

Scholarship Deadline	April 1, 2016
Mobile Food Pantry	April 6, 2016
Chicken Dinner	April 7, 2016
Ladies Guild Meeting	May 3, 2016
Mobile Food Pantry	May 4, 2016
Chicken Dinner	May 5, 2016
First Communion	May 8, 2016
Ecumenical Picnic	May 15, 2016
Bike and Build Visit	May 15, 2016
Mobile Food Pantry	June 1, 2016
Chicken Dinner	June 2, 2016
Mass for 2016 Graduates	June 5, 2016
With Presentation of Scholarship	
Vacation Bible School	June 20-24, 2016
(Cave Quest)	



*Grand Merci* to Joyce Miller and her wonderful team for bringing New Orleans to us in the Parish Enrichment Center. The night was complete with Joyce's Jambalaya Dinner, Mardi Gras Trivia, a fun photo booth and the crowning of our Mardi Gras King Frank Fraize and Queen Lillian Morgan.

