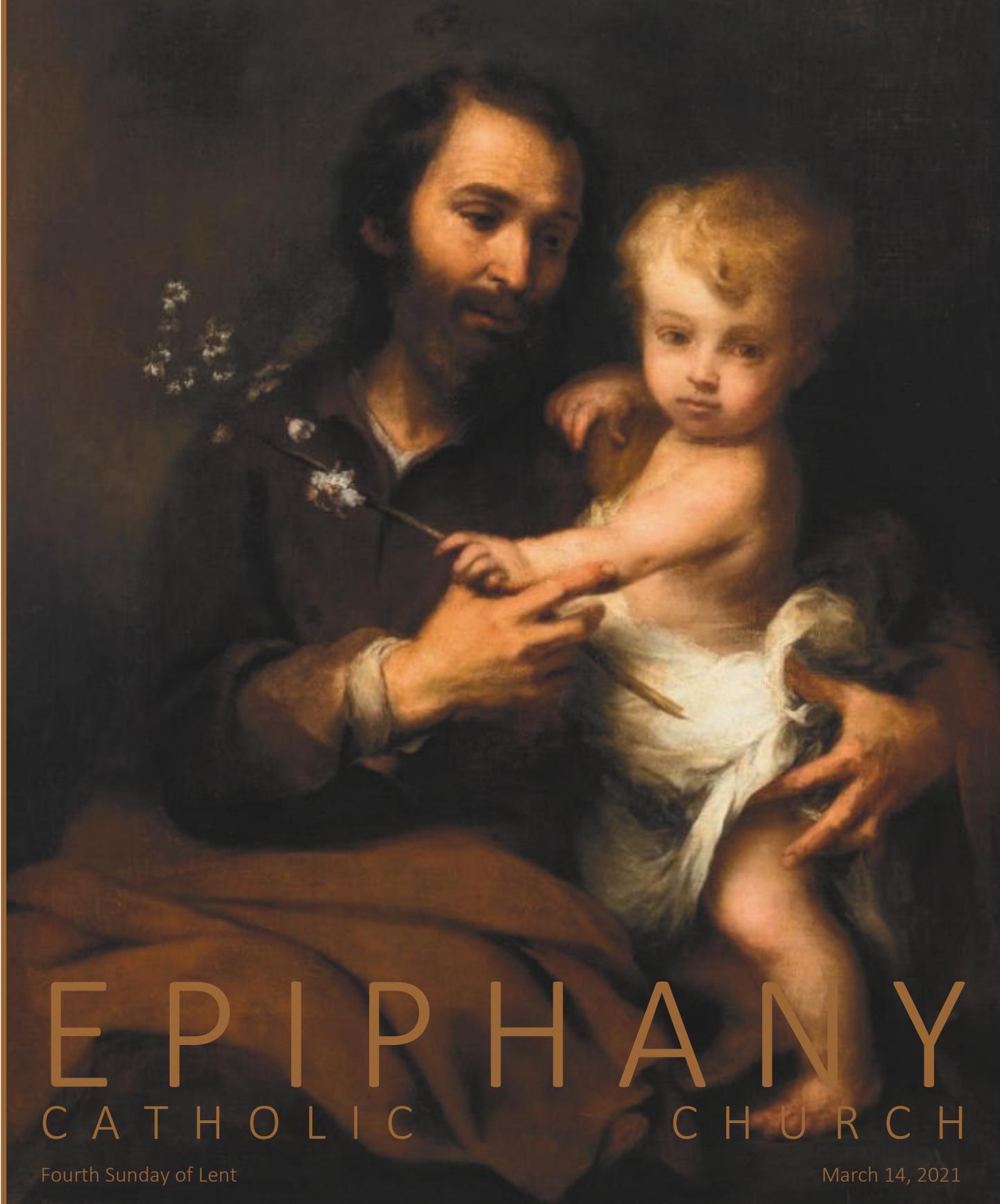


SAINT JOSEPH HUSBAND OF MARY



EPIPHANY  
CATHOLIC CHURCH

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 14, 2021

# FROM POPE FRANCIS

## CLEANSING POWER OF JESUS



Jesus drove out from the Temple in Jerusalem the moneychangers and all the buyers and sellers. Why did Jesus do something this forceful and provocative? He did it because the Father sent him to cleanse the temple: not only the Temple of stone, but above all the temple of our heart. Jesus could not tolerate his Father's house becoming a marketplace (cf. Jn 2:16); neither does he want our hearts to be places of turmoil, disorder and confusion.

Our heart must be cleansed, put in order and purified. Of what? Of the falsehoods that stain it, from hypocritical duplicity. All of us have these. They are diseases that harm the heart, soil our lives and make them insincere. We need to be cleansed of the deceptive securities that would barter our faith in God with passing things, with temporary advantages. We need the baneful temptations of power and money to be swept from our hearts and from the Church.

To cleanse our hearts, we need to dirty our hands, to feel accountable and not to simply look on as our brothers and sisters are suffering. How do we purify our hearts? By our own efforts, we cannot; we need Jesus. He has the power to conquer our evils, to heal our diseases, to rebuild the temple of our heart.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (v. 19). Jesus Christ, he alone, can cleanse us of the works of evil. Jesus, who died and rose! Jesus, the Lord! Dear brothers and sisters, God does not let us die in our sins. Even when we turn our backs on him, he never leaves us to our own devices. He seeks us out, runs after us, to call us to repentance and to cleanse us of our sins.

"As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek 33:11). The Lord wants us to be saved and to become living temples of his love, in fraternity, in service, in mercy.

Jesus not only cleanses us of our sins, but gives us a share in his own power and wisdom. He liberates us from the narrow and divisive notions of family, faith and community that divide, oppose and exclude, so that we can build a Church and a society open to everyone and concerned for our brothers and sisters in greatest need. At the same time, he strengthens us to

resist the temptation to seek revenge, which only plunges us into a spiral of endless retaliation. In the power of the Holy Spirit, he sends us forth, not as proselytizers, but as missionary disciples, men and women called to testify to the life-changing power of the Gospel. The risen Lord makes us instruments of God's mercy and peace, patient and courageous artisans of a new social order. In this way, by the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the prophetic words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians are fulfilled: "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's wisdom is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:25). Christian communities made up of simple and lowly people become a sign of the coming of his kingdom, a kingdom of love, justice and peace.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body, and about the Church as well. The Lord promises us that, by the power of the resurrection, he can raise us, and our communities, from the ruins left by injustice, division and hatred. That is the promise we celebrate in this Eucharist. With the eyes of faith, we recognize the presence of the crucified and risen Lord in our midst. And we learn to embrace his liberating wisdom, to rest in his wounds, and to find healing and strength to serve the coming of his kingdom in our world.

By his wounds, we have been healed (cf. 1 Pet 2:24). In those wounds, dear brothers and sisters, we find the balm of his merciful love. For he, like the Good Samaritan of humanity, wants to anoint every hurt, to heal every painful memory and to inspire a future of peace and fraternity in this land.

**"The road to a full recovery may still be long, but I ask you, please, not to grow discouraged. What is needed is the ability to forgive, but also the courage not to give up." —Francis, at Qaraqosh**

The Church in Iraq, by God's grace, is already doing much to proclaim this wonderful wisdom of the cross by spreading Christ's mercy and forgiveness, particularly towards those in greatest need. Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and suffering.

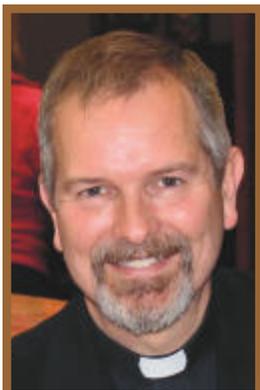
That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you and to confirm you in your faith and witness. Today, I can see at first hand that the Church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people.

Dear brothers and sisters, I commend you, your families and your communities, to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, who was united to her Son in his passion and death, and who shared in the joy of his resurrection. May she intercede for us and lead us to Christ, the power and wisdom of God.

—Francis in Erbil, Iraq, March 7, 2021

# FROM THE PASTOR

## WHY A YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

### Why did the Pope declare a year of St. Joseph?

In making his declaration, Pope Francis noted that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the saint's proclamation as patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1870.

Pope Francis said the coronavirus pandemic has heightened his desire to reflect on St. Joseph, as so many people during the pandemic have made hidden sacrifices to protect others, just as St. Joseph quietly protected and cared for Mary and Jesus.

“Each of us can discover in Joseph -- the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence -- an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,” the pope wrote.

He also said he wanted to highlight St. Joseph's role as a father who served his family with charity and humility, adding, “Our world today needs fathers.”

He also said he wanted to highlight St. Joseph's role as a father who served his family with charity and humility, adding, “Our world today needs fathers.”

### What special graces are available during this year?

As Catholics pray and reflect on the life of St. Joseph throughout the coming year, they also have opportunities to gain a plenary indulgence, or remission of all temporal punishment due to sin. An indulgence can be applied to oneself or to a soul in Purgatory.

An indulgence requires a specific act, defined by the Church, as well as sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, prayer for the pope's intentions, and full detachment from sin.

Special indulgences during the Year of St. Joseph can be received through more than a dozen different prayers and actions, including praying for the unemployed, entrusting one's daily work to St. Joseph, performing a corporal or spiritual work of mercy, or meditating for at least 30 minutes on the Lord's Prayer.

### Why does the Church honor St. Joseph?

Catholics do not worship saints, but ask for their heavenly intercession before God and seek to imitate their virtues here on earth. The Catholic Church honors St. Joseph as the foster father of Jesus. He is invoked as the patron saint of the Universal Church. He is also the patron of workers, father, and a happy death. —Fr. Eric

# CELEBRATING OUR FAITH

## SACRAMENTS SCHEDULE

### Mass Times

Incense is used at 10:30am Sunday Mass. All Ministers have Gluten-free Hosts. 7:30 am Sunday Masses are Broadcast on Facebook at Epiphanyparish.com Drive Up Communion is available Sundays till 8:30am (Canopy).

**Note: 8:15am School Masses** are currently closed to the public due to the Pandemic.

#### Sunday, March 14, Fourth Sunday of Lent

4:00pm	Anthony Valone
7:30am	Tom and Margaret Kelley
10:30am	Tom and Mark Krause

#### Monday, March 15, Lenten Weekday

7:00am	Diane Bussan
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#### Tuesday, March 16, Lenten Weekday

7:00am	Gene and Patricia Kernes
8:15am	Mary Ellen Novak

#### Wednesday, March 17, Lenten Weekday

7:00am	Pretet and Kirby Family
8:15am	Harold Hoefler

#### Thursday, March 18, Lenten Weekday

7:00am	Nancy Hausler
8:15am	Kevin Martin

#### Friday, March 19, Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary

7:00am	Dorothy Boedeker
5:30pm	Lucy Mancias

#### Sunday, March 20, Fifth Sunday of Lent

4:00pm	Laurie Swartz
7:30am	Sally Leahy
10:30am	Clara & Issa Benjamin

### Confession Times

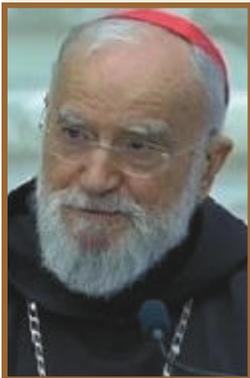
5:00pm Friday and 3:00pm Saturday in the Parish Hall. Please enter from the Corridor and depart out the South Door onto the Parking Lot.

### Adoration Chapel News

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has returned to the Chapel: Monday to Friday: 7:30am to 6pm.

# CARD. CANTALAMESSA

## OUR MODEL: JESUS & THE BEATITUDES



The rise of modern thought stems from the Enlightenment and is epitomized in the maxim on living “etsi Deus non daretur,” as if God did not exist. The pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer took up this maxim trying to give it a positive Christian connotation. In his intentions, it was not a concession to atheism, but a plan for spiritual life: doing one’s duty even when God looks distant; in other words, not turning him into a repairman-God, always willing to come to rescue wherever man has failed.

Even in this version, the maxim is debatable and has been rightly criticized. In the present context, though, we are interested in it for a totally different reason. The Church runs the lethal risk of living “etsi Christus non daretur,” as if Christ did not exist. It is the assumption on which the world and its media talk about the Church all the time. Their interest focuses on its history (above all the negative one, not that of holiness), its organization, its point of view on current issues, its internal facts and gossip. Jesus as a person is mentioned once in a while if at all. A proposal was made in Italy years ago – and is still in place in some countries – about a possible alliance between believers and non-believers based on common civil and moral rights, on the Christian roots of our culture and so on. Such an agreement, in other words, was not based on what happened in the world with Christ’s coming, but on what happened later, after him.

An additional objective – and regrettably unavoidable – fact is that Christ does not come into play in any of the three most lively dialogues conducted between the Church and the world. He does not come into play in the dialogue between faith and philosophy, because philosophy deals with metaphysical notions, not with historical entities, as the person of Jesus of Nazareth is; he does not come into play in the dialogue with science, with which one may only discuss the existence of a creator God and of an “intelligent design” beneath evolution; finally, he does not come into play in the interreligious dialogue, where the focus is on what religions may do together, in the name of God, for the good of humankind.

In even the fairest concern with responding to the needs and provocative challenges of history and of culture, we all, including us believers, run the lethal risk of behaving, “etsi Christus non daretur.” As if it were ever possible to speak about the Church excluding Christ and his Gospel. I was deeply struck by the words of the Holy Father in the General Audience of November 25th last year. He said – and by the tone of his voice you could

tell the subject deeply touched him:

**We find here [in Acts 2:42] four essential characteristics of ecclesial life: listening to the apostles’ teaching, first; second, the safeguarding of mutual communion; third, the breaking of the bread; and fourth, prayer. They remind us that the Church’s existence has meaning if it remains firmly united to Christ, that is, in community, in his Word, in the Eucharist and in prayer. It is the way we unite ourselves to Christ. Preaching and catechesis bear witness to the words and actions of the Teacher; the constant quest for fraternal communion shields us from selfishness and particularisms; the breaking of the bread fulfils the sacrament of Jesus’ presence among us. He will never be absent; it is really him in the Eucharist. He lives and walks with us. And lastly, prayer, which is the space of dialogue with the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Everything in the Church that grows outside of these “coordinates” lacks a foundation.**

As can be seen, in the Pope’s words the four coordinates of the Church are reduced to only one: remaining anchored onto Christ. All this has made me want to devote these Lenten meditations to the person of Jesus Christ. Personally, I was the first to have to overcome a possible objection. A glance at the index of the documents of Vatican II, under the entry ‘Jesus Christ,’ or a quick scroll through the papal documents of the last few years tells us much more than what we can say in these short Lenten meditations. What use is it, then, to choose this subject? The thing is that here we will be talking about Jesus Christ alone, as if he alone existed and it was worth dealing with him alone (which is then, ultimately, the truth!).



We can do that because we are not forced, as the Magisterium is, to also deal with other issues: pastoral, moral, social, environmental problems, as well as these days the challenges caused by the pandemic. It would be totally wrong if we only did what we do here, but equally wrong if we never did. From my experience with television, I have learnt one thing. There are various ways of framing an object: a ‘wide shot,’ when the speaker is framed with everything else surrounding him and a ‘close up,’ when only the speaker is seen, and finally, the so-called ‘extreme close-up,’ when only the speaker’s face or even their eyes

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BLOOD DONATIONS

ARE  
*Essential*



**Normal Fire Department  
Blood Drive**  
**Epiphany Catholic Church**

Parish Hall  
1002 E. College Avenue  
Normal, IL 61761

**Tuesday, March 23, 2021**  
**12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

For an appointment call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767)  
or visit [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org)

You can save up to 15 minutes when you donate blood by using RapidPass! Visit [redcrossblood.org/RapidPass](http://redcrossblood.org/RapidPass) for more information. Bring a photo ID or your blood donor card, or two other forms of ID.

All donations tested for COVID-19 antibodies. Results in 1-2 wks.  
[RedCrossBlood.org/AntibodyTesting](http://RedCrossBlood.org/AntibodyTesting)



Your donation is essential. We'd like to show our gratitude for being a vital part of our American Red Cross community with a special gift. Get an exclusive Red Cross T-shirt when you come to give March 15-26, while supplies last.

**Schedule a blood donation appointment today:**

Download the Blood Donor App | [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org) | 1-800-RED CROSS | 1-800-733-2767

# FROM THE PRINCIPAL

## MATH CURRICULUM ECS JH



Dear friends,

The following is a description of the Math Curriculum at our Junior High:

### Junior High Mathematics at Epiphany Catholic School

Differentiated instruction aims to meet the educational needs of students with diverse abilities. At Epiphany Catholic School (ECS) 5th grade, students are evaluated to determine the most suitable math track in Junior High. A differentiated math curriculum results in a group of students studying Geometry in their 8th grade year while others are taking Algebra I or Pre-Algebra.

### Central Catholic High School Credit for ECS Advanced Math

All advanced math courses taken at ECS will be so noted on the Central Catholic High School (CCHS) transcript for the student when enrolled at CCHS as a freshman; grades for these courses will not be averaged in the high school GPA at CCHS upon enrollment at CCHS. One hour of high school credit will be accorded any 7th grade student that successfully passes the End of Course Assessment, Algebra I course taught at ECS, and any 8th grade student that successfully passes the End of Course Assessment and Algebra I course taught at CCHS. In each of the tracks described below, ECS students are challenged according to ability and receive a solid preparation for High School Math.

### Summary of Math Tracks

All math classes are almost an hour each, taught in uninterrupted blocks in the morning, and all courses are completely aligned with the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. Determination of math placement will be made each year, following a review of assessment information and grades. Letters will be sent to parents in the summer if the school is recommending student placement in 6th grade advanced math classes or if recommendation for placement in advanced classes changes at the end of a school year. In the event that students do not meet the criteria at the end of an advanced course, repeating of the course or moving to the standard level course in the Junior High Mathematics sequence may be required. Math scores at our school are consistently well-above those of the diocese. We truly feel that our students are well-prepared for the Math course they will encounter at the next levels of their educational journey.

Have a great week filled with the blessings of our Lord,

Mike Lootens, GO KNIGHTS!!!

# PARISH UPDATES

## CATCH UP HERE

### Epiphany Youth Ministry

High School Youth Group meets on Sundays from 6:30-8 pm in the Parish Hall. Join us this Sunday to grow in faith together, have fun, deepen our relationship with God, serve others, and grow in community and friendship. All are welcome! Next Sunday (3/21) we are OFF for spring break.

Junior High Youth Group (grades 6-8) meets once a month to play games, share faith, and grow together in our journey towards Christ. The next Junior High Youth Group is Friday, April 23rd from 7-8:30 pm.

Junior High Small Group: We're starting an evening small group! If you're in 6-8th grade and interested in discussing faith with a small circle of friends, then Small Group is for you. We meet Wednesday evenings from 7 to 8 - email Kara to sign up!

To receive Youth Ministry updates, join our Flocknote group or email [kara.esker@epiphanyparish.com](mailto:kara.esker@epiphanyparish.com) to be added to the email list!

### Discerning Priesthood or Consecrated Life?

"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." Are you being invited to share the mission of Jesus as a priest or in the consecrated life? Call Fr. Chase Hilgenbrinck at (309) 671-1550, or e-mail: [fr\\_hilgenbrinck@cdop.org](mailto:fr_hilgenbrinck@cdop.org). That we may have faithful priests and consecrated religious to guide us, just as Jesus was the light that came into the world, we pray to the Lord.

### Parish Outreach

(St. Vincent de Paul) Orlando Lopez email is [outreach@epiphanyparish.com](mailto:outreach@epiphanyparish.com) If you find yourself in serious economic need due to the pandemic, St. Vincent de Paul and Epiphany Parish want to help. Email Orlando Lopez at Parish Outreach.

### ECS School Principal Sought

Normal Epiphany Catholic School, a Pre-K – 8 school of approximately 380 students, is seeking applicants for the position of principal for the 2021-2022 school year. A principal application packet outlining qualifications and procedures is available at <http://cdop.org/careers> or by calling the Office of Catholic Schools at (309) 671-1550. A review of applicants will start in late March with interviews in mid-April.

### Normal Knights of Columbus Scholarship

The Knights are offering a scholarship that is open to any Epiphany Parish 8th grader planning to attend Central Catholic in the

Fall of 2021. Details along with the application can be found at <http://kofc6498.org/vfm/forms/>. Applications due 3/31.

### Sacraments this Spring

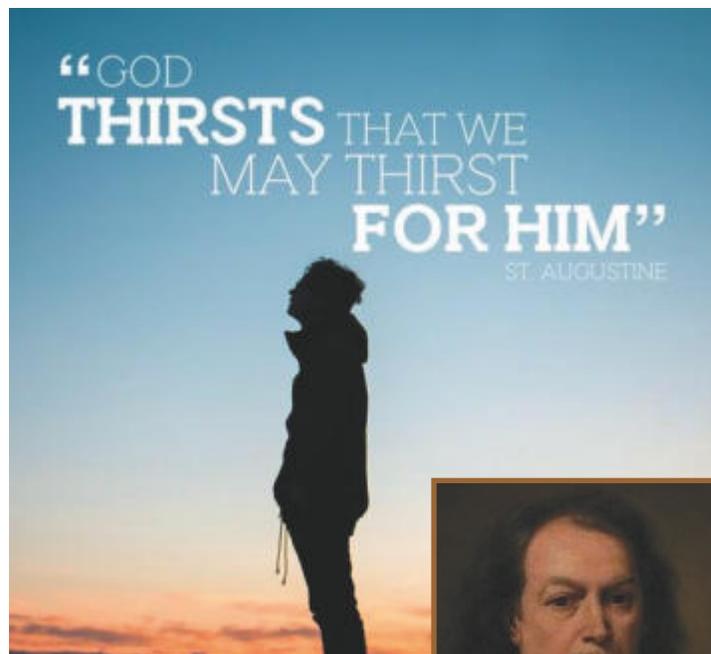
CCD and School students have been preparing to receive their Sacraments of Initiation. Please remember our students receiving First Reconciliation, Holy Communion, and Confirmation in your prayers.

- First Reconciliation: Various dates have been scheduled in the month of April.
- First Communion: Sun. April 25th @ 2 pm (LIMITED ATTENDANCE: Mass closed to the public)
- Confirmation: Sat. May 8th @ 7 pm (LIMITED ATTENDANCE: Mass closed to the public)
- Homeschoolers: Those preparing to receive these sacraments and wish to participate in the mass, please contact Kara Esker, CCD Coordinator.

### 8th Grade Students, Aspire To Be Saints

We love showing families of 7th and 8th grade students around our school! 8th grade students also have the opportunity for a Shadow Day - spend the day with a freshman, go to their classes, enjoy our lunch and meet your future classmates. Call Scott Vogel, Director of Enrollment at 533-2200 to schedule a day. Central Catholic's online application is live now. Vis-

it [www.blmccchs.org](http://www.blmccchs.org) and click on the "Apply Today" button. This begins your registration process and keeps you informed about all of the important dates and opportunities to find out more about our school. If you're thinking about Central Catholic, apply today!



Cover Painting: Saint Joseph and the Christ Child, by Bartolome Esteban Murillo, about 1670. This is the same artist for the Epiphany painting behind the altar (the original is in Toledo, OH, of all places). He was a Spanish Baroque painter, best known for his religious works.



Murillo: Self-Portrait

## PARISH CONTACTS

### Parish Office

(309) 452-2585  
epiphanyparish.com

### School Office

(309) 452-3268  
epiphanyschools.org

### Parish Staff

Fr. Eric Powell (Pastor)  
pastor@epiphanyparish.com  
309-660-7860

Deacon Mark Cleary (Baptisms)  
mcleary08@comcast.net

Cindy Myers, Kara Esker (Pastoral Team)  
Pastoral.assitant@epiphanyparish.com

Kara Esker (Youth, CCD)  
kara.esker@epiphanyparish.com

Domine King, Joyce Tellman (Office Staff)  
office@epiphanyparish.com

Angie O'Connor (Parish/School Books)  
business.manager@epiphanyparish.com

Sean and Jennifer Stevens (Music)  
music@epiphanyparish.com

## SHARING IN THE WORK OF GOD

Thank you for your generosity in support of our mission.

### Gifts from Our Parish Family

<b>March 7, 2021</b> .....	\$14,392
E-giving.....	\$9,149
Special.....	\$1,032
Parish Endowment.....	\$672
School Endowment.....	\$195
Capital Improvement.....	\$165
<b>Weekly Budget</b> .....	\$24,500
YTD Budget (36 weeks) .....	\$882,000
YTD Income.....	\$876,658
YTD Balance.....	(\$5,342)

are framed. Well, in these meditations, we propose, with God's help, to shoot 'extreme close-ups' framing the person of Jesus Christ.

Our purpose is not apologetic, but spiritual. In other words, we do not speak to convince others, non-believers, that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but to make it possible for him to become ever more truly the Lord of our life, our all-encompassing reference point, to the point of feeling, like the Apostle, 'taken possession of by Christ' (Phil 3:12) and to be able to say with him – at least as a wish – 'to me life is Christ (Phil 1:21). Therefore, the question that will accompany us is not going to be: 'What place does Jesus have in the world and in the Church?', but: 'What place does Jesus have in my life?' Moreover, this is going to be the best way of arousing other people's interest in Christ, that is the most effective way of evangelizing.

Yet, we need to clarify one thing. Which Christ do we want to talk about? There are indeed various 'Christs': there is the Christ of historians, of theologians, of poets, and even the Christ of atheists. We wish to speak of the Christ of the Gospels and of the Church, more precisely, of the Christ of the Catholic dogma defined by the Council of Chalcedon of 451. Now and then it is good to listen to that definition again, at least in part in the original text:

**Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach to profess one and the same Son: our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, true God and true man, [made up of] rational soul and body, one substance with the Father for the divinity, and one substance with us for the humanity, like us in all things, except for sin [...], one and the same only-begotten Jesus Christ; to be acknowledged in two natures [...], the property of each nature unailing and concurring to form one only person and hypostasis.**

We can use the image of a dogmatic triangle on Christ: the sides are the humanity and the divinity of Christ and the summit is the unity of his own person.

The Christological dogma does not intend to be a summary of all the Biblical data, a sort of distillate containing the huge wealth of statements regarding Christ which can be read in the New Testament, by reducing them to the slim and dry formula: 'two natures, one person.' If that were the case, the dogma would be terribly reductive and even dangerous. Yet, that is not the case. The Church believes and preaches about Christ all that the New Testament says about him, without any omissions. By means of the dogma, the Church has only tried to sketch a reference framework, to draft a sort of 'fundamental law' which any statement on Christ is to go by. All that is said about Christ must by now respect that certain and inconvertible fact: the fact that he is God and man at the same time; better said, in the same person.

Dogmas are 'open structures' (Bernhard Lonergan), willing to accept all the genuine novelties and realities that each age dis-

covers in the word of God. They are open to evolve from within, providing that they always proceed 'in the same sense and along the same line.' Which means that the interpretation given in one age must not contradict that of the previous age. Hence, approaching Christ by the way of dogmas does not mean tiringly repeating the same things, perhaps only changing the wording. It means reading Scripture within Tradition, with the Church's eyes, that is reading it in an ever ancient and ever new manner.

## Christ, a perfect man

Let us see what all this means, if we apply it to the dogma of the perfect humanity of Christ, which is the 'extreme close-up' we want to use to frame Jesus in the present meditation.

During Jesus's life on earth nobody ever thought of questioning the reality of the humanity of Christ, his really being a man like others. When the New Testament refers to Christ's humanity, its interest focuses more on its holiness than on its truth or reality, that is more on its perfection than on its ontological completeness.

At the time of the Council of Chalcedon this notion of Christ had not changed, but the focus was no longer the same. Against the heresy of Docetism, the Church had to affirm that Christ had had a real human flesh; against the Apollinarian heresy, that he had also had a human soul, and later, in the seventh century, the Church would have to fight against the Monothelite heresy, for the acknowledgement of Christ also having a will, and therefore a truly human freedom. Due to the heresies we have just hinted at, all the interest in Christ as a 'man' shifted from the problem of the novelty and holiness of such humanity, to that of its perfection or ontological completeness.

As I said, the New Testament is interested not so much in claiming that Jesus is a 'true' man, as in his being a 'new' man. He is defined by Paul as 'the last Adam' (eschatos), that is 'the ultimate man' (cf. 1Cor 15:45ss.; Rm 5:14). Christ has revealed the new self, the one 'created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth' (Eph 4:24; cf. Col 3:10). Jesus Christ is 'the Holy one of God': this is who he is solemnly proclaimed in two moments of his earthly life (Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69). Jesus is not so much the human being that looks like other human beings, as the human being that all other human beings are to look like. He is the only one of whom one has to say what Greek philosophers said of man in general: he is 'the measure of all things'!

Once the dogmatic and ontological fact of the perfect humanity of Christ has been secured, today we may once again uphold this primary Biblical notion. We also have to do so for another reason. Nowadays, nobody denies that Jesus was a man, like the supporters of Docetism and others who denied the full humanity of Christ. In fact, we are witnessing a strange and upsetting phenomenon: the 'true' humanity of Christ is silently affirmed as an alternative to his divinity, as a kind of counterpoise. It is a general contest to determine who goes furthest in affirming the 'full' humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, by going so

far as assigning him not only suffering, anguish and temptation, but also doubt and even the possibility of making mistakes.

So, the dogma of Jesus as a 'true man' has either become a truth that is so much taken for granted that it does not bother or upset anyone, or even worse, it has become a dangerous truth that is used to justify instead of criticizing the secular thought. Affirming the full humanity of Christ today is like shooting fish in a barrel.

## The holiness of Christ

Let us therefore devote the time we have left to contemplate (it is the right word) the holiness of Christ and be dazzled by it, before drawing any practical consequences. This is the first 'extreme close-up' on Jesus we want to use in this meditation: letting ourselves be fascinated by the infinite beauty of Christ, 'the most handsome of the sons of mankind.'

Observing the Gospels shows us that the holiness of Jesus is not only an abstract principle, or a metaphysical deduction, but it is genuine holiness, in its being lived out moment by moment and in the most concrete situations in life. The Beatitudes, to give an example, are not just a beautiful life plan that Jesus sketches for others; it is his own life itself and his experience as it is revealed to the disciples, by calling them to access the same sphere of holiness. The Beatitudes are Jesus' self-portrait.

He teaches what he does; that is why he can say: 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart' (Mt 11:29). He says that one must forgive their enemies but he himself goes as far as forgiving those who are crucifying him with the words 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do' (Lk 23:34). In fact, it is not a single episode, one or the other, that helps to exemplify the holiness of Jesus, but every deed, every word of his mouth.

Beside this positive element of the full and constant obedience to his Father's will, the holiness of Christ also shows a negative element, which is the absolute lack of any sin, 'Can any of you charge me with sin?' says Jesus to his opponents (Jn 8:46). On this point all apostolic witnesses speak with one voice: he 'did not know sin' (2 Cor 5:21); 'he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth' (1 Pt 2:22); he had 'been tested in every way, yet without sin'. (Hb 4:15); 'It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners' (Hb 7:26). John, in his first letter, does not grow tired of proclaiming 'he is pure... in him there is no sin...; he is righteous» (1 Jn 3:3-7).

Jesus' conscience is a transparent crystal. Absolutely no admission of guilt there, nor apology begging forgiveness either before God or men. There always reigns the serene certainty of truthfulness and righteousness and of good conduct, which is not the same as the human presumption of justice. No other character in history has dared say the same about themselves.

Such absence of guilt – and of admission of guilt! – is not connected with one or another act or saying of the Gospel, the his-

toricity of which may be questioned, but the whole Gospel excludes it. It is a lifestyle which is reflected in everything. You may look in the remotest corners of the Gospels and the result is always the same. The idea of an exceptionally holy and exemplary humanity is not enough. This idea would contradict that lifestyle. Such confidence, such exclusion of sin, as can be noticed in Jesus, would surely indicate an extraordinary humanity, but extraordinary in terms of pride, not of holiness. An awareness of that nature either amounts to the greatest sin ever committed, greater than Lucifer's, or to sheer truth. The resurrection of Christ provides concrete proof that it was absolute truth.

## 'Sanctified in Christ Jesus'

We now move on to consider what the holiness of Christ means for us. And here we immediately come across some good news. There is indeed some good news, a joyful proclamation, also regarding the holiness of Christ. It is not so much that Jesus is the Holy one of God, or that we too are meant to be holy and immaculate. No, the happy surprise is that Jesus communicates, grants, gives us his holiness away for free! It is that his holiness is also ours. Even more: that he himself is our holiness.

Every human parent can hand on to their children what they have, but not what they are. If they are artists, scientists, or even saints, not necessarily are their children born artists, scientists or saints as well. Parents can teach those skills or give them an example, but not hand them over as a sort of inheritance. Yet, Jesus, in our Baptism, does not only hand on what he has, but also what he is. He is holy and makes us holy; he is the Son of God and makes us children of God.

Vatican II also says it: 'The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy' (Lumen gentium, 40). Christian holiness, prior to being a duty, is a gift.

What shall we do to embrace this gift and turn it as it were into an experience that is lived out, not only believed? The first fundamental answer is faith. Not just any faith, but the faith through which we make our own what Christ has won for us. A daring faith that gives new wings to our Christian life. Paul wrote:

**Christ Jesus [...] became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord (1 Cor 1, 30-31).**

What Christ became 'for us' – righteousness, sanctification, and redemption – belongs to us; it belongs to us more than if we had done it ourselves! As the great Byzantine master Cabasilas put it: 'Since we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Christ, who bought us back at a high price, then what is Christ's own belongs to us, it belongs to us more than what comes from us.' In this regard, I never

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get tired of repeating what St Bernard wrote:

**Indeed, I trustfully grab for myself [in the original, I usurp!] what I lack from the bowels of the Lord, because they overflow with mercy. [...] My merit, therefore, is the mercy of the Lord. Surely my merit will not be wanting until the Lord is wanting in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are many, I too am very great as regards my merits. [...] Will I possibly sing my righteousness too? 'O God, I will tell of your singular justice' (cf. Ps 71: 16). It is indeed mine too; for you have made yourself righteousness coming from God (cf. 1Cor 1:30) .**

We are not to resign to die before carrying out, or renewing, this kind of 'coup' recommended by saint Bernard. What holy impudence!

Saint Paul often calls on Christians to 'put off the old self' and to 'put on Christ.' The image of stripping and putting on does not only point to an ascetic operation, consisting in discarding certain 'clothes' or 'habits' and replacing them with others, that is dropping vices and acquiring virtues. That operation is first of all accomplished by means of faith. In a moment of prayer, in this Lent tide, one can sit before the Cross and, with an act of faith, hand over to him all their sins, their past and present misery, as they strip and throw in the fire their dirty clothes; then they again put on the righteousness that Christ has purchased for them. He or she, as the Publican did in the temple, will say: 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner!' and they too go home 'justified' (cf. Lk 18:13-14).

Some Church Fathers encompassed this great secret of Christian life in an image. Imagine, they say, that an epic fight has just taken place in the stadium. A brave man has faced the cruel tyrant enslaving the city with huge toil and suffering and has overcome him. You were on the grandstand, you did not fight, or toil or suffer any wounds. Yet, if you look up to the brave man, if

you rejoice with him on his victory, if you weave flower crowns for him, if you provoke and arouse the assembly to support him, if you bow in joy to the winner, you kiss his head and you shake his right hand; in sum, if you are so mad about him as to consider his victory as your own, then I tell you will certain have your share of the winner's prize.

There is more than that, though: suppose your winner has no need of the prize he won for himself, but wishes, more than anything else, to see his supporter being honored and considers a prize of his fight the crowning of his friend, in that case will the latter not possibly win the crown, even though they did not toil or suffer wounds? They will surely win it! The same – these Fathers say – happens between Christ and us. He is the brave one who on the cross overcame the great tyrant of the world and gave us life again. We are asked not to be absent-minded 'spectators' of such pain and of such love. As saint John Chrysostom writes:

**Our swords are not stained with blood, we did not take part in the fight, we did not suffer wounds, we did not even see the battle, and behold we obtain a victory. The fight was his own, the crown is our own. And since we too have won, let us imitate what soldiers do in these cases: with joyful voices let us extol his victory, let us sing hymns of praise to the Lord.**

Of course, this is not the end of the story. From appropriation we need to move on to imitation. The above-mentioned text of the Second Vatican Council on holiness as a gift carries on by saying: 'Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints" (Eph 5:3) and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience" (Col 3:12), and to possess

the fruit of the Spirit in holiness (cf. Gal 5:22; Rm 6:22)'.

Yet we have so many other opportunities to hear of the duty to imitate Christ and to nurture virtues, that, for once, it is fitting to stop there. Another reason is that, if do not make that initial leap in faith that opens us to the grace of God, we will not go that far in the way of imitation. As saint Gregory the Great put it: 'You do not get from virtues to faith but from faith to virtues.'

If we really do not want to part without at least one small practical resolution, here is a helpful one. Jesus' holiness consisted in always doing what pleased the Father. He said: 'I always do what is pleasing to him' (Jn 8:29). Let us try and ask ourselves as often as we can, before any decision to make and answer to give: 'What is it, in the present case, that would be pleasing to Jesus?', and do that without delay. Knowing what Jesus' will is turns out to be easier than knowing in abstract terms what 'God's will' is (even though the two in fact coincide). To know Jesus' will we have to do nothing but remember what he says in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is there, ready to remind us.

1.([http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_2020.11.25\\_udienza-generale.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_2020.11.25_udienza-generale.html)).

2.Cf. Milan Machovec, *Gesù per gli atei*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 1973.

3.Denzinger – Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, nr. 301-302.

4.N. Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, IV, 6 (PG 150, 613).

5.Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 61, 4-5 (PL 183, 1072).

6.Cf Col 3:9; Rm 13:14; Gal 3:27; E4:24.

7.Cf N. Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, 5 (PG 150, 516 s.).

8.John Chrysostom, *De coemeterio et de cruce* (PG, 49, 396).

9.St Gregorio Magno, *Omelia su Ezechiele*, II, 7 (PL 76, 1018).



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