

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R. *of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother*



from the desk of *Mother Della Marie*
FEBRUARY 2021

ENTER IN WITH NEW FERVOR

Dear Friends,

As Lent draws near, after a year of enduring the Coronavirus pandemic, there is a longing in our hearts for normalcy. I hope and pray that, by the time you receive this letter, the pandemic will be fading into the past. I have learned much through this year and hope to continue to seek His will in every circumstance that He allows.

Despite being so tired from this past year, I know God has brought about a far greater good for our souls than if no difficulties had occurred. A deep gratitude has developed in my heart for many things that I took for granted, especially having Mass available daily. This past March, when we thought we were having our last Mass for who knew how long, I wept. My love for the Eucharist grew and my going-through-the-motions evaporated. We ended up being able to have Mass most of the time, though privately, and this, too, was a great sadness. As a result, I carried Christ's body with greater care in my heart for God's people. Another blessing was how life slowed down throughout the entire world. This slower pace provided time and space for God to break through into hearts. Essential questions surfaced: what is the meaning of life? Does my life have a purpose? etc. In the imposed solitude, souls became more aware of God's presence and their need for Him. Loss, upset plans, and isolation drew people to God.

We all have endured suffering to differing degrees and on many levels — spiritual, emotional, financial, and social — and this weighs on my heart. When I feel the pinch, fatigue, and burden of the policies that we practice within our community, my heart is united with those in most need of hope. One of the greatest spiritual gifts for me during the pandemic is the solidarity I feel with persecuted Christians, though in a very small way. They have so many privileges taken from them. Many endure years of imprisonment and torture. I feel so thankful for what I do have, despite the trials of the year.

As Lent quickly approaches, it feels as though we have already been in Lent for a year. Despite the weariness we may feel from the trials of 2020, love can help us to enter into this Lent with new fervor. I think of the hungry, the persecuted, the enslaved, and the refugees throughout the world and what Jesus endured for my sake and I want to give more. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-3).



This past year, I wasted many opportunities to offer my life for others. I know I will fail in little and big ways during this Lent, but Love will get me back up to focus on what really matters. I can't do this without continually keeping my eyes on Christ nor without help from the communion of believers. Let us pray for each other to be strengthened this Lent to enter in with renewed love of God and neighbor.

Please know that you are in our hearts and prayers. I am grateful for the witness of your life and your support of the witness of our consecrated life. We need each other! Thank you for your

Fr. Tom Sparacino, rector of St. Paul's Seminary in Pittsburgh, led us in a Eucharistic procession on our motherhouse property on June 14, 2020, the feast of Corpus Christi.

outpouring of prayers and financial support that we have received. Due to your generosity, we were able to surpass our end-of-December goal of \$300,000. We chose a moderate goal, due to the uncertainties of COVID. The amount we raised keeps us in step with meeting our financial needs this fiscal year, which ends in June. We know it has been a sacrifice, especially during the pandemic.

Gratefully,

Mrs. Della Marie Doyle, TOR

Mother Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R.

Reverend Mother

PS: Especially during this time of difficulty and as we enter Lent, we want to be able to pray for you personally. Just click on the “Prayer Requests” tab on our website homepage. Our intercessory prayer is an important ministry for us at our Motherhouse.

Look Deeper and Forward

BY SR. ANNA ROSE CIARRONE, T.O.R.

“So, what’s it like in the convent during a pandemic?” This is one of the top questions I’ve been asked by friends and family over these past months. Daily family life during 2020 was altered for pretty much all of us, and our Motherhouse family was no exception.

Truth be told, as an introvert, when the effects of the pandemic began last March, I was happy about the prospect of more ‘quiet time’! However, as weeks turned into months, I found myself becoming agitated. The novelty of pandemic-inspired togetherness had worn off and it just became hard. I felt the ache of greater separation from those whom our community loves and serves, and the difficulty of not being able to be there as we would have liked. The various social, political, and Church difficulties of 2020 weighed on me heavily, and there seemed to be no solution. I felt my own personal poverty in my failings to love my sisters in the face of some of these difficulties, and as we navigated the stresses of our changing assignments after our General Chapter. In a word, I felt helpless.

In the midst of this, I continually leaned upon a word that the Lord



Sr. Anna Rose explained the racecourse to Sr. Jean before the Francis Footrace on October 4, 2020.

gave me last Spring: “look deeper.” When I did this, I was able to see that the source of my restlessness

ultimately stemmed from failing to look deeper: refusing to look at the situation of the world, and even myself and my own sisters in community, with God’s eyes. But when I did look again, I began to see new things. The people and situations were not changed, but with God’s eyes, they became new.

For example, our celebration of the great feast of St. Francis looked very different in 2020. Instead of being out and about, that morning found Sr. Bridget and me organizing our first-ever “Francis Footrace” on our property! Many sisters (ranging in age from 25 to almost 80!) participated in different distances, capped off by an awards ceremony of sorts at lunch that had many of us in tears laughing. The day was one of many blessings that were given to us – to me – this year, if I was humble enough to have eyes to see it. In every situation this past year, I had a choice: to see only what I did not have, or what the Lord in His incredible wisdom had given to me, and to receive it with open hands. That’s not to say that what I have been given is easy: on the feast of St. Francis I was also grieving those (including some of my own sisters) who were not able to be with us. On this day and many others, I’ve been tempted to believe that our life, whether it’s our prayer and intercession, or our life in community, is pointless because it’s so ‘small.’ Every time this lie surfaced, and the helplessness that accompanied it, I was invited to look deeper, and see instead what is invisible, but true: that my life, our community life, lived in love, is truly healing the world: one act of forgiveness, given and received, at a time, one act of mercy at a time.

Each of us in our own families or communities has been tasked with this incredible charge: to BE the love, reconciliation, and forgiveness that we desire for our Church and world, right in our homes. Jesus told us that “whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, sister, and mother.” (Mt. 12:50) Each of us can bring Him to birth each day by the way that we live! As we’ve now begun to wade into 2021, my prayer and hope is that each of us can take what we’ve experienced last year – the wounds and also the joys – and let them be the ‘raw material’ that Christ can transform with His love into healing for the world.



All the walking and running sisters posed at the starting line on race morning!

WISDOM AND GRACE FROM SOME OF OUR COMMUNITY FRIENDS

I am grateful to God for you and the many ways our sisters are blessed by our families and community friends. After I read Mother Della Marie's letter, I thought of various families who have inspired me in responding to the challenges of 2020. My experience praying the rosary with the Kurtz family on Zoom came to mind. What a joy it has been for me to see firsthand the faith being passed on in such a loving way! I remembered being struck by Steve Massaro's dependence upon God and Bill Talerico's courage to step out in faith as they led their companies through the financial uncertainties of this year. I was reminded that we have many loved ones who are on the medical frontlines, like Dr. Paul Shaniuk. We want to thank each of you for the important parts you play in seeing your families and others through these trying times. In honor of all of you and as a source of inspiration, we share our friends' wisdom here.

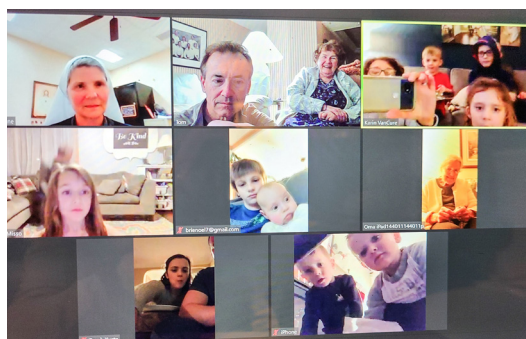
-Sr. Katherine Caldwell, T.O.R.

STEVE AND STEPHANIE MASSARO - PITTSBURGH, PA

"Before the pandemic, the Massaro Company had thirty-three construction projects underway. We heard about the pandemic in February. In March, we heard it was a real threat. By March 20, 2020, all business were shut down in Pennsylvania. It was hard for us to wrap our brains around what was happening. None of us had ever experienced anything like this in our lifetime. On March 21, we got word that the hospital projects could continue, eleven of our thirty-three active projects, but the other projects and offices were shut down. We were not able to open the offices again until August, and many of our fifty office employees have opted to work from home.

"What I have learned through this experience is that you have to lean upon your faith even more. If you want calm, you have to go where calm is found—only in the Lord. I found that I had to pray more and to ask the Holy Spirit to give me the gifts that I needed. More communication was needed, and we needed to utilize all the various avenues available. As we come through these challenging times, there are lessons from God that we have learned, such as slowing down, reprioritizing, spending more time with family, and appreciating all that has been given to us."

TOM AND CARRIE KURTZ - CLEVELAND, OH



"When COVID first started back in March we had just had a new grandchild join our family. Finding out shortly after that we couldn't see her or the rest of our 14 grandchildren was heartbreaking for us. Trying to find a way that we could stay connected, our oldest daughter discovered Zoom. That's when our family Zoom rosary was started. ... We have had up to 30 people praying at one time, from our 82 & 89 year-old great-grandmothers, to our newest family member, our 5 month-old granddaughter.

"This has been the greatest blessing to have come out of COVID and the fruit keeps multiplying. My favorite part of the rosary is when the grandkids say their petitions. ... Every family takes turns praying a decade of the rosary while the rest stay muted. ... As difficult as COVID has been, without it, we would never have experienced the blessing of our family Zoom Rosary."

PAUL AND MELANIE SHANIUK - CLEVELAND, OH

"I remember Paul (an Acute Care Internal Medicine Hospitalist at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center) going to work overnight one week in March not knowing what he would encounter, or how safe it was for him to



be going between the hospital and home ... Now, several months into this pandemic, the urgent stress of the early days has mostly faded, although for Paul, that stress flared up in December as the hospital filled up and his workload reached levels not seen since his residency four years ago. But as I look back over this year, I see how God was present to us every day. He was present in the beauty of God's timing of Paul committing to daily prayer back in January, which he later leaned on during the difficult moments; in Paul and me, as we relied on one another for support; in our kids, who responded with equal parts obliviousness and resilience; and in the friends and family who supported us with love and prayers from afar."

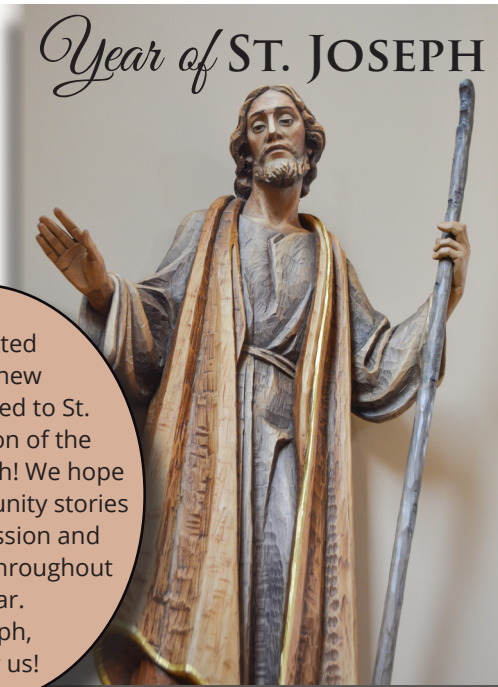
BILL AND SUZEE TALERICO - PITTSBURGH, PA

"We have always practiced Trustful Surrender. That was certainly put to the test in March. We received a call from a client on March 13 asking if we could pause our engagement because they were concerned about the impact of the '14 days to flatten the curve.' We agreed to pause the invoicing but keep doing the work. We received similar calls every day until March 27. We have always said 'it is never wrong to do the right thing' and supporting those who were hurting seemed like the right thing. After we continued supporting our clients during the hardships that materialized in March, every client has come back to us and is doing well ...

"The people who have been able to survive – and somehow thrive – during this pandemic are those who live in a state of gratitude. Our family virtue for this year was gratitude. Each night after family prayer we all share the one thing for which we are grateful. Expressing gratitude helps us to embrace the joy that is present if only we are willing to be open to it. Serving others is one of the best ways to be grateful for what we have. It is in the eyes of those we serve that we see all that we have. It is also the meaning of life – we were built to be in communion with others and with God."

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.
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Year of St. JOSEPH

We are excited for this new year dedicated to St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church! We hope to share community stories of his intercession and fatherly care throughout the year. St. Joseph, pray for us!

CONTACT US! (740) 544-5542
 WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG



"To Glorify God and Make Known His Merciful Love"



SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR *Lenten Retreat*
 SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2021

"Into Your Hands, Father"



WWW.FRANCISCANSISTERSTOR.ORG/EVENTS/LENTEN-RETREAT-2021

Once again, we are excited to offer a free, virtual Lenten Retreat to help you enter into the graces of the season. This year, our theme is focused on Jesus' and our trust and abandonment to the Father. The retreat will include talks, testimonies, music, meditations, and optional small groups led by a sister.

Our sisters will also share short video reflections **during** Lent, leading up to the retreat, on our Facebook page and Youtube channel. If you would like to join an optional small group during Lent to meet and share about these reflections, please register on our website by **Sunday, February 14.**

The Lenten Retreat can be found on our webpage under Events. Registration for small groups and the retreat itself (coming soon) will also be found at that link. If you are part of a parish group, Bible study group, or prayer group, and would like your group to participate, contact Sr. Anna Rose at (740) 544-5542 ext. 135. Individuals and groups of family and friends are also welcome!



This is what two of our friends said about our Advent Retreat small groups:

“ The retreat was peaceful and quiet, an oasis in the midst of the world, which I was able to enjoy with a number of other friends. In opening it up to others, I experienced much more. ... We would be up for a small group again, leading up to and into Lent. ”
 -Marney

“ It was good to be able to hear others' experiences of the talks and what touched each of our hearts, to comment, ask questions, and to pray together with one of the sisters as our facilitator. We received insight into the Lord's movements within each of us and that was very special. I felt it set the tone for our Advent in preparation for the birth of our Lord. ”
 -Carol