



Spring, 2015

A Newsletter of St. Joan of Arc Parish, Marlton, NJ



Shining through you....

Our first edition of Encounter (November) was well received by our parish community. Only a handful of the 1,000 copies that were offered at the beginning of Advent remain today. So now we are offering our second, quarterly publication. This edition offers us the opportunity to gain insight into the faith stories of members of our community, and the amazing story of one who encountered God through suffering. As we

look toward the conclusion of Lent, and the great hope and love of the Lord's Resurrection at Easter next week, it is our hope that these stories might strike a cord of resurrection in your relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ and that we may all be transformed by His never failing love for us. C.S. Lewis was a great scholar, author and Christian. His quote on the right appropriately leads us into this edition. As you get a glimpse of our Lord shining through those who've shared their faith journey with us, may His light shine more brightly through you. God bless you in this most important of our liturgical seasons, as we all journey toward the great Easter Vigil and Season, together.

"Don't shine so others can see you.

Shine so that, through you, others can see Him."

-- C.S. Lewis

Peace! Fr. Rich.



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St. Paul's First Encounter with Jesus - by Fr. Jorge Bedoya

In chapter 26 of the book of Acts we find the most popular and complete autobiographical narrative of the encounter between Saul and Jesus. The experience happened while Saul was on his way to Damascus with instructions to take Christians, as prisoners, to Jerusalem.

Saul persecuted Christians until he heard God's voice calling him to open his eyes and recognize Christ. After this encounter with Jesus, Saul became one of his followers and changed his name to Paul.

Before he met Jesus, Saul was a zealous Pharisee, proud of his Jewish traditions, fine education, and a personal commitment in following the law. His family roots and traditions were something that he could not easily renounce because it was like second nature to him. He was profoundly religious, and his heritage was a jealously guarded treasure that would not be surrendered to anyone. For that reason, Saul had a great concern to defend his faith, a great zeal to promote it, and showed great violence, persecuting those who might threaten it.

This explains Saul's intolerance toward Christians and his need to exterminate them because he believed that they were challenging precisely the roots of his precious treasure. His fanaticism led him into a violent ideology, which made him incapable of understanding others unless they were committed to the same ideals. Saul forgot that he was only a human being, blessed by God, not because he was anything in himself, but because God loved him. In other words, Saul had a radical, distorted image of God.

But Jesus confronts Saul and his self-justification. Saul was incapable of confessing his failures and weakness. And when Jesus asked Saul, "Why do you persecute me?" He suddenly understood that he had confused the truth about Jesus. Paul understood that we are not the owners but the servants of the truth.

Paul's encounter with Jesus led him to understand that everything was given to him. His conversion was not due to his strength, meditation, spiritual exercises, long prayers, or fasting. Everything was given to him so that he could be for all people, a sign of the merciful God, whose initiative always precedes our seeking.

Paul's experience teaches us that the fundamental sin of human beings is the failure to recognize the gift of God as the fruit of His love. Paul was refusing God's goodness to him under the banner of possessing good things. Sometimes we are like Paul, and we put ourselves in God's place. We judge our lives by the success or failures of our own initiatives, leaving God by the wayside. And we forget that God's mercy is far beyond any merit, or desire, or thought of our own.

To summarize, Paul's encounter with Jesus teaches us that only God's grace can transform darkness into light and only by the action of God, can a violent man become merciful.



Jesus said.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

(Acts 26:14)

MY FAITH JOURNEY BEGINS – by Joel Aronow

I was born and raised in the Jewish faith and had my Bar Mitzvah when I was 13 years old in 1973. I was baptized a Catholic at the Easter Vigil, 2013. It didn't hit me until I was asked to write about my conversion that my Baptism was 40 years after my Bar Mitzvah. The number 40 has such symbolism in both the New and Old Testaments.

I have often been asked whether there was a single defining moment that convinced me to convert to Catholicism or Christianity. I would have to say, "No." Rather, it was a series of events (not always recognized for what they were at the time they occurred). Once people hear that I married a Catholic, especially that her dad was a Deacon, they automatically assume that my conversion was to accommodate my wife, in-laws or my children. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was never put under any pressure to convert. I am convinced that I was touched by the Holy Spirit and that the incidents which followed were the only true direction my life could take.

In the summer of 2001, I was invited to take a motorcycle trip through the Blue Ridge Mountains down to Atlanta, Georgia. It was the month before I proposed to my wife. On the second day of the trip I was leading. I began to have a conversation with who I know was Jesus. The conversation revolved around when I would die and my life's purpose. I remember thinking I have a lot to live for and was not ready to die. There were no answers given. Moments later, after rounding a bend in the road. I saw a large billboard in a field along the road simply proclaiming Christ is here or Christ is alive. I knew it was profound, but didn't give the message its due. Approximately 3 miles later I had an accident with my motorcycle while exiting the Parkway. Thankfully, only my pride was injured. Yes, I still have that motorcycle.

In recent years I had started to attend Mass every week with my family. The more I listened the more truth (the Holy Spirit) revealed himself to me. The Old Testament was regularly read as part of the Mass. I began to see the natural progression of Catholicism from Judaism. Being Jewish I felt a real sense of connection with Jesus, the Apostles and the early church fathers. To this day when the "Holy, Holy, Holy" is sung I get goose bumps. Sometimes I literally feel lifted. This is especially true when the verse "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" is sung. This prayer resonates with my very soul.

I had felt for some time that conversion would happen, but was hesitant because I feared the revelation would hurt my mother. I had told myself, "Perhaps I should wait awhile." I did not know what an Epiphany was until I related one of my turning point moments to a Catholic coworker. I had gone out to lunch with coworkers to a favorite Chinese restaurant in Haddonfield. While walking on the sidewalk I glanced down at my feet and observed a silver and blue enameled cross, with no chain, on the bricks. I picked it up and when I turned it over I realized it was a crucifix, like one I had seen attached to a Rosary. I looked around but no one was nearby. I immediately felt like I was meant to find it and put it into my pocket. I thought how unique it was to have my first cross. When we returned from lunch I told the story to my coworker who looked stunned and agreed I was meant to find it. You could imagine my disappointment when I lost the crucifix a week later because I had a hole in my pocket. The disappointment didn't last when I realized I was meant to lose it so someone else could find their way just as I did. Not long after that, while attending Mass, I thought to myself I wonder when RCIA starts. I didn't have to wait long. I picked up the Church Bulletin and it stated RCIA was starting a new class. Father announced that information was



Joel, his wife Tami and their three Children (Anthony, Rachel and Evan) are members of St. Joan of Arc Parish

available after Mass. The signs couldn't be clearer and I felt more than ever I was making the right decision. By now, my wife and I were married 12 years when I told her I was enrolling in RCIA!

Once RCIA started I had what I believe was another Epiphany. After a couple of classes I felt an overwhelming sense that I had to visit the Crucifix above the Tabernacle. On the break I asked Father if I could get in, but the doors were locked. Father led me a backway through what I now know is the Sacristy. I had no idea we would exit at the Crucifix itself. I was startled at first then felt totally at peace as I silently spoke to Jesus through his image on the Cross. It is so amazing that my journey seems to have begun with a conversation with Jesus while motorcycling through the Blue Ridge Mountains many years earlier, and now having gained peace speaking to Him at the Cross.

As a convert my faith is strong because I chose to become a Catholic Christian. I hope others may feel inspired by my faith journey, though it has really just begun.

Kayla Mueller, age 26

Kayla Mueller's Encounter with God -- By Sue Latella

Sadly, on February 10, 2015 the world learned that another American, Kayla Mueller had lost their life at the hands of the ISIS militants holding her in captivity. We all heard of the extraordinary faith and compassion of this young woman, only 26 at her death, through the statements of her family and the release of a letter she smuggled to them during her captivity. The depth of her faith, her awareness of God and the message of our Lord, Jesus Christ is profoundly present in her writings. In a 2011 letter to her father on his birthday, she wrote; "I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine....I find God in suffering." As Msgr. Richard LaVerghetta said in a recent homily, "This is exactly what Jesus teaches us. This is what God revealed through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's the message of the Paschal Mystery. Thank you, Kayla, for showing us the heart of God."

We share with you here, the text of her last letter from captivity. It is not only a testament to the amazing faith of this young woman, it is a testament to one who truly allowed the light of Christ to shine through her. Let's all pray for Kayla and all those of any faith in the

"I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how You are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek You."... "I will always seek God. Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love; I find God in suffering. "

"Everyone,

If you are receiving this letter it means I am still detained but my cell mates (starting from 11/2/2014) have been released. I have asked them to contact you + send you this letter. It's hard to know what to say. Please know that I am in a safe location, completely unharmed + healthy (put on weight in fact); I have been treated w/ the utmost respect + kindness. I wanted to write you all a well thought out letter (but I didn't know if my cell mates would be leaving in the coming days or the coming months restricting my time) but primarily I could only but write the letter a paragraph at a time, just the thought of you all sends me into a fit of tears. If you could say I have "suffered" at all throughout this whole experience it is only in knowing how much suffering I have put you all through; I will never ask you to forgive me as I do not deserve forgiveness. I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator b/c literally there was no else.... + by God + by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall. I have been shown in darkness, light + have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it. I pray each day that if nothing else, you have felt a certain closeness + surrender to God as well + have formed a bond of love + support amongst one another... I miss you all as if it has been a decade of forced separation. I have had many a long hour to think, to think of all the things I will do w/ Lex, our first family camping trip, the first meeting @ the airport. I have had many hours to think how only in your absence have I finally @ 25 years old come to realize your place in my life. The gift that is each one of you + the person I could + could not be if you were not a part of my life, my family, my support. I DO NOT want the negotiations for my release to be your duty, if there is any other option take it, even if it takes more time. This should never have become your burden. I have asked these women to support you; please seek their advice. If you have not done so already, [REDACTED] can contact [REDACTED] who may have a certain level of experience with these people. None of us could have known it would be this long but know I am also fighting from my side in the ways I am able + I have a lot of fight left inside of me. I am not breaking down + I will not give in no matter how long it takes. I wrote a song some months ago that says, "The part of me that pains the most also gets me out of bed, w/out your hope there would be nothing left..." aka—The thought of your pain is the source of my own, simultaneously the hope of our reunion is the source of my strength. Please be patient, give your pain to God. I know you would want me to remain strong. That is exactly what I am doing. Do not fear for me, continue to pray as will I + by God's will we will be together soon.

All my everything, Kayla"

A Young Adult Finds the Lord



spend time in an empty church when they're stressed out? In today's society not many young adults would admit that. Not most kids; especially not teenagers. Some of you may know me as one of the altar servers "that always serves" or the daughter of the movie man (Gene Kotowski). However, there is more than meets the eye. My name is Christina Kotowski. I am 19 years old, a 2013 graduate of Cherokee High School, and I have been a part of St. Joan of Arc since I was little. Growing up, I never really understood the meaning of "going to church." I thought of it as a tradition, a weekly routine. Like most kids, I really didn't like it. Some days you would catch me fast asleep. Sadly, it's not

Do you know any teenagers that

my proudest of moments. I had faith. I didn't realize yet that it's something much more than me. It was a blessing in disguise. Things started to change in fourth grade. My CCD teacher told our class that more altar servers were needed. Altar servers are kids that help the priest during the Mass. As a fourth grader, I didn't know all that. However, something happened that day that I will never forget. I heard a voice. It wasn't a fellow student or my teacher. It was a voice. The voice told me to sign up to be an altar server. By listening to the voice, I had no idea that it would be one of the most rewarding and fun experiences in my life. That was almost a decade ago and I served with priests as far back as Fr. Chuck and Msgr. Pedata.

Around the time that I was about to graduate from middle school, and begin my high school education, my father (an avid member of the Knights of Columbus) invited my brother, Matt, and me to join him in the March for Life. It was cool because, that year, it also happened to be on my Dad's birthday. For him, it was almost like a tradition. For us, it was a new experience. While I don't recall much about that day, there is one moment I'll always remember. Matt and I were sitting in the back of the bus. Dad was up front helping with the agenda for the march. A lady was trying to find a seat, and she was having no luck. Matt and I saw we could fit another seat next to us. . We asked her to join us. We saw how happy and grateful she was to find a seat. However, the coolest part of that random act of kindness, was that Matt and I had found a new friend.

As I reflect on the first half of my life I wasn't really aware of God's presence. I had faith, but wasn't quite sure what it was, or how He might be working in my life. Entering high school is a big deal for any fourteen year old. At times it can be overwhelming. As my CCD "career" came to a close, my teacher brought in guest speakers from St. Joan's Youth Group, WINGS. The

speakers were kids in my age group. They seemed "cool." They talked about all their activities, events, games, chat nights, meetings, etc. This was a group of teens like me! I thought, "Why not give it a shot?" That's exactly what I did. I started slow, attending the 8th grade ice cream social. I didn't know anyone. Thankfully, the upperclassmen showed me around. I made a little small talk, but at first it was difficult. By the end of the night I had made at least one new friend -- a friend that I am still in contact with today. So as middle school turned into high school, although the school changed, there was one thing that remained constant through my high school years -WINGS! WINGS gave me the tools to become a leader, to take charge, to brainstorm ideas, develop teamwork and most importantly WINGS was where my friends were. Some friends, I've grown up with. Some, we've grown apart. Others have inspired me to keep going. WINGS also gave me a different perspective on my faith and church.

By the time sophomore year rolled around I had a bit more confidence in myself. I was also challenged. Every year, in November, WINGS has their fall retreat. Of course, our retreat would not be complete without a Mass. Except this Mass was different; the Gospel was about the Transfiguration. I had not heard that story before. As the priest read the Gospel my eyes closed. (I promise you I was not falling asleep.) As my eyes closed, my ears opened and I clearly heard God's Word. As the Gospel unfolded I could actually see the story – the whole story! What I saw was such a beautiful vision. I didn't want it to go away. For the first time, I understood the Gospel and started to recognize Je-

In January of my senior year, things got heavier. On my way home from work, I was in a car accident, sliding on black ice. My car rear-ended the car in front me with five passengers.

Finding the Lord

-- by Christina Kotowski

Luckily, nobody was injured. My car was nearly totaled. Though the accident was traumatic, I realized that if I hadn't turned the wheel I would have hit the car head on, deploying my airbag and crushing the back of their car. I was grateful and lucky to be alive. I remember being so calm at the accident scene and breaking down the minute I got home. All I kept saying was "Thank God! Thank God!" My guardian angel was with me and helped me turn the wheel to essentially save my life and the lives of the passengers in the other car.

Looking back at my faith journey thus far, I've come to a realization. The Lord is always with me. He is there through the ups and the downs. God does work in mysterious ways. Whether it be a voice calling me, a random act of kindness, being part of WINGS, listening to the Gospel or even slightly turning the wheel in an accident -- God was there!

My faith has grown and my eyes have been opened through these experiences. To this day I'm still a firm believer in "everything happens for a reason." After reading this I hope you too, take a step back and realize that you are never alone.

"I am able to do all things, through Him who strengthens me."

- Philippians 4:13



DO YOU NEED PRAYER?

Abide In Me - our intercessory prayer ministry joins together to bring to God whatever your need; a special intention, a sickness, death, addiction, a life crisis or problem. Let us raise our voices on your behalf. You can also join us in prayer on Wednesdays, 1 - 2 pm in the Gathering Room of the church.

Please email your intentions to: Marijane33@comcast.net or your can call (609) 744-7579. For more information, visit the ministry page of St. Joan of Arc website at:

www.stjoans.org/ministries/ abide-in-me/

EASTER TRIDUUM SCHEDULE

HOLY THURSDAY- April 2

Morning Prayer - 9:00 am

Mass of the Lord's Supper 7:30pm

Adoration following Mass Evening Prayer 11:00 pm

GOOD FRIDAY - April 3

Morning Prayer - 9:00 am
Stations of the Cross - 12:15 pm
Commemoration of the Lord's
Passion with Veneration of the
Cross -- 3:00 pm
Tenebrae Prayer Service
7:30 pm

HOLY SATURDAY - April 4

Morning Prayer - 9:00 am Blessing of the Food - 9:30 am *Great Easter Vigil - 8:00 pm*

EASTER SUNDAY - April 5

Mass Schedule Church - 7:30 am, 9:00 am, 10:30 am, 12:00 noon Gym - 9:00 & 10:30 am



My Faith Story

-- by Carol Alcorn

One must begin somewhere when asked to explain how you developed your relationship with the Lord. You ask yourself this question and the answer pops right off the page as you type. The reality of the Lord was always part of the lives of the people I was blessed to know, as I grew up. This was our reality. Jesus was a figure at the center of our homes, our school, and our neighbor's homes. He was mentioned in our conversations in good times and in bad. It was often casual conversation about the goodness of God in our lives, not a large dose of formal prayers, but a natural expression of our trust in the reality of God among us.

My family and neighbors were trustworthy and kind to people all around us. Our family fed the neighborhood stray dog, Tex, as well as the neighborhood beggar, Shorty Lee. Our home was a place to bring people fleeing the tragedies of WW II. The parish priests popped in and out of our homes, unannounced, any time of the day.

Our faith was nourished in a very small elementary school. But it flourished in a very large Catholic high school for girls. The many Sisters teaching at Little Flower inspired me, by a call to excellence, endurance, faithfulness and prayer. The reality of Jesus was once again present in the people that surrounded me. Faith is observed rather than taught. At this time, I remember invoking the Holy Spirit through the thick and thin of my studies. My education continued at Chestnut Hill College in an atmosphere rich in the solid traditions of the Catholic church, pre-Vatican II. But many cracks were opening. The questions and expressions of students pointed to a change happening under the surface. My faith began to develop a new independence from set ceremonies to a personal search for simple moments of prayer. Many frantic calls to the Holy Spirit provided reassurance and endurance on

difficult days. Understanding often came later, when I could see the many ways I had been guided.

The reality of Our Lord as partner, presence and protector was obvious through the challenging years of building a home with a loving husband and five children. We sought connections with families who took their faith seriously. We developed a cluster of friends who studied and praved together, while supporting each other in works of care and concern for many needy causes. Many times, when I experienced a blank or was too busy to pray, I turned to recorded songs and music filled with sounds of joy and praise to the Lord. It revived my spirit. I loved to join workshops, seminars, discussions and courses, on scripture and liturgy. However, our very large parish did not have room for innovation. As I looked for small ways to change things, a special path opened for me to personally relate to the life of Our Lord Jesus for motivation, meditation, and meaning. Valuable insight and encouragement was given to me by the priests of the Passionist Community. Their house was a blessing to many of our friends and neighbors.

Through the years, I wrote skits and plays for the school children. Many were included in our Advent liturgies. Often, the loving presence of our Lord surfaced through my writings and poetry. I carried His life-giving peace in heart and mind as we faced the loss of three children from the families of very close friends. In episodes of tragedy, I picked through the book of Psalms for many ways to express my feelings of loss. There I discovered encouragement to trust in the Presence, without answers or resolution.

Through many summers in the Smokey mountains of Tennessee, my spirit learned to listen and rest in the sounds of flowing water, from streams, waterfalls and rain. These sounds were the music for joyful words of gratitude and praise to the Lord among us. To this day, I value

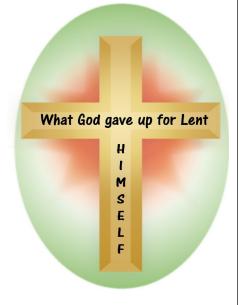


Carol and her husband, Jack, are members of St. Joan of Arc parish and reside in Marlton.

quiet moments when I drive in the car or move about in places away from the endless noise of our outside

world. I need a quiet space to hear the pulse of my spirit; I listen for the signs of God's love, always near, in the ordinary moments of life.

I value the people who bring me to the awareness that we are a people able to bring God's presence to others as faith observed rather than taught. I have learned through my life's journey that my simple life of faith needs a community nourished by the Eucharist, healed and graced by the Sacraments and inspired by the Spirit of the Scriptures. And so my faith journey continues -- past memories with gratitude -- toward mysteries with hope -- and a faith that reaches for the Lord in each moment of time. with love.



GO IN PEACE TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD

-- by Deacon Barry Tarzy

The Deacon proclaims the close of Mass, when he says: "Go in peace to love and to serve the Lord". To go may be easy, but without the Holy Spirit, serving the Lord, in everyday life, it is an everyday challenge.

In the words of St. Peter's epistle, we are a people "set apart." Set apart. That means we are called to make peace in our personal lives and in all that happens around us. We are – all of us, young and old, chosen to bring Christ to others. That is our central purpose as Christians.

In the creed, we stand and proudly proclaim our faith in the Trinity – God the Father who creates us, God the Son, Jesus Christ, who lived among us and redeemed us, and God the Holy Spirit, who lives in each of us and empowers each of us to do what we could never do on our own.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the God we love and serve and take with us when we leave church. This is the God in whose name we are sent when we hear "The Mass is ended. Go in peace.... to love and to serve".

We all know that love is more than just words; love moves us to action, to do something holy. It is the small, everyday things that strengthen our relationships with those around us. And we are also responsible to act as part of the entire human family, and so on a global level - the love of God living in us is there to fulfill responsibilities that we simply must not ignore.

When each of us was baptized, we were enjoined with Christ to go forth to act as priests, making Jesus present to the world. To go forth to act as prophets, speaking on behalf of the

oppressed and bringing hope to those in despair. To go forth, to act as kings, serving and protecting the vulnerable and providing for the needs of others. That is who we are, and what we are, to be in this world we are exploring each day.

And so the words "love and serve" are tied together. We are sent not only to "love the Lord" but also to "serve the Lord." So we should not leave the church with our own agenda, expecting to do things our own way, but to take what we have experienced as followers of Jesus – and to speak God's words in every situation we encounter... do what Jesus would do.

God's will be done. Think on it -- shortly before communion we prayed the words "thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. I know deep in each of our hearts we want to live what we pray. We are more than simply mouthing the words. We are each committed to following Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit – we can do just that.

God's will. And while it may not be easy some times, Jesus wants each of us to love our neighbor -- serve our neighbor. There may be times when God's will may run counter to our human instinct, and this is where growing each day in faith comes in. You already have great faith... but it still must grow.

So... "Thanks be to God" for you, for each and everyone of you. Thank you for coming to Mass during all the tough winter weather, and even the days when you just didn't feel like coming. Your faith brings us together.

We are the people of St Joan of Arc church. People who chose to live and love.... as Jesus did.

"Thanks be to God"... for you.

This newsletter is a volunteer offering of love for the parish community and friends of St. Joan of Arc Parish, Marlton, NJ. Visit our website to learn more about our parish: www.stjoans.org. If you are interested in submitting an article about your Catholic faith journey, a personal moment of encounter with our Lord, or ideas about how we, as a community, can better evangelize and bring an encounter with our Lord Jesus to others, please contact any member of our editorial team.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

We are all God's children; we are all sisters and brothers in Christ! All are welcome!

LITURGY SCHEDULE:

Saturday Vigil: 5:30 pm

Sunday: 7:30, 9, 10:30 am & 12

Noon

Korean Mass: 3:30 pm

on the 2nd Sunday of the month

Student Mass: 5:30 pm every 4th Saturday of the month

Daily Mass Hours

Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat.: 9 am Tue. & Thu.: 7 and 9 am

Morning Prayer:

Mon., Wed., Fri.: 7 am

Adoration: Tuesdays, 5 - 7 pm

Benediction: at 7 pm

Confession: Saturday, 4 pm or Anytime by appointment

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HOW TO BECOME CATHOLIC:

856-983-0077

Call Fr. Rich or Fr. Jorge at 856-983-0077 for any questions you have.

BAPTISMS, WEDDINGS,
BLESSING OF MARRIAGE:
Please call the parish office at