

THE *Spirit* OF ST. FRANCIS NEWSLETTER



April
2014

Your Official News Source for St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, San Antonio, Texas

The Holy Triduum

A Sacred Renewal for Disciples of Jesus Christ

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Week as a faith community, we look forward to the Holy Triduum, the most important liturgical period on the Church's calendar. The following are short reflections taken from Pope Francis' message on this Holy Triduum. Photos by Larry Perry.

Holy Thursday

Mass of the Last Supper

This is moving. Jesus, washing the feet of his disciples. Peter didn't understand it at all, he refused. But Jesus explained it for him. Jesus – God – did this! He himself explains to his disciples: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:12-15).

It is the Lord's example: he is the most important, and he washes feet, because with us what is highest must be at the service of others. This is a symbol, it is a sign, right? Washing feet means: "I am at your service". And with us too, don't we have to wash each other's feet day after day? But what does this mean? That all of us must help one another. Sometimes I am angry with someone or other ... but... let it go, let it go, and if he or she asks you a favor, do it.

Help one another: this is what Jesus teaches us and this what I am doing, and doing with all my heart, because it is my duty. As a priest and a bishop, I must be



Newly baptized and confirmed stand with their sponsors at the Easter Vigil 2013.
Photo by Larry Perry.

at your service. But it is a duty which comes from my heart: I love it. I love this and I love to do it because that is what the Lord has taught me to do. But you too, help one another: help one another always. In this way, by helping one another, we will do some good.

Now we will perform this ceremony of washing feet, and let us think, let each one of us think: "Am I really willing, willing to serve, to help others?". Let us think about this, just this. And let us think that this sign is a caress of Jesus, which Jesus gives, because this is the real reason why Jesus came: to serve, to help us.

-Pope Francis, excerpt from Holy Thursday homily, Rome, March 28, 2013

Good Friday Veneration of the Cross

Thank you for having taken part in these moments of deep prayer. I also thank those who have accompanied us through the media, especially the sick and elderly.

I do not wish to add too many words.

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Faith, Friendship, and Fun!

Vacation Bible School 2014

Vacation Bible School gears up for another year of faith, friendship, and fun! Scheduled for June 16 – 20, Vacation Bible School offers children a week of scripture-based games, activities, and group sessions aimed at growing their knowledge of God. Each day begins in Henke Hall at 9:00 am and ends at 12:30 pm. This year's theme, "Weird Animals: Where Jesus' Love is One-of-a-Kind," will be incorporated into all the games and activities.

Elementary School Faith Formation Coordinator, Miriam Flores, says that her hope for the children who attend VBS is that they will want to continue growing their faith, especially on Sundays. "My hope for kids who come to VBS is that through the fun and excitement, they will realize that they love God and God loves them," says Miriam. "And even though Sunday is quieter, I hope they will make a connection with wanting to be here on Sunday, wanting to grow in their faith, wanting to understand the Mass."

VBS team leaders are expecting a full Vacation Bible School this year, with 200 elementary participants, 25 middle school participants, and 100 volunteers. Staff liaison, Jessica Malkowski, says there is no experience quite like Vacation Bible School. "There is nothing like the energy," says Jessica. "It's high energy, it's love for God in its purest form, and it usually overwhelms me. It's really beautiful."

Deacon Gene Festa, who has volunteered with VBS for years, agrees that the children make this event special. "I look forward to working with the children because, with children, what you see is what you get," says Gene. "Children are genuine, they are excited about their faith, they jump up and down, and it's very refreshing and encouraging to know you are doing something really important."



Children participate in outdoor activities at Vacation Bible School 2013.
Photos by Don Bernhard.

In addition to indoor and outdoor team-building games and activities, bible stories are brought to life in theatrical presentations throughout the week. Children will also receive a "Watch for God" bracelet on their first day to remind them to see God in other people and acts of charity throughout the day. "And each day when the children return," says Miriam, "they tell their crew how they saw God the day before." These God-sightings are tracked with stickers on a poster and the children can see how the sightings of God grow throughout the week.

Vacation Bible School volunteers love this ministry and return each year to enjoy the week-long catechetical experi-

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The *Spirit* of St. Francis NEWSLETTER

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Let the Children Come to Me

St. Francis of Assisi Children Prepare to Celebrate First Holy Communion

Elementary Faith Formation children in sacramental preparation excitedly await to celebrate their first holy communion in the month of May. These children have been in preparation since August 2013 and received God's mercy in the sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in December. Their parents, sponsors, family, and friends eagerly anticipate the celebration, which will occur in the Masses throughout all the full weekends in May.

Miriam Flores, Elementary School Faith Formation Coordinator, says that there is no other ministry as satisfying as first communion catechesis preparation. "I love the gift that Jesus gives us of himself," says Miriam, "and I love bringing kids to that point in their lives, bringing them to that table, to a relationship with God—I don't think there is anything more satisfying than that."

First Holy Communion sacrament preparation at St. Francis of Assisi is a home-based program that allows parents to guide their children through the process and journey with them on it. Miriam has witnessed the benefits of this home-based program from past experience. "Handing over the sacramental preparation program to the parents as their



Young ladies receive the Eucharist for the first time. Photos by Larry Perry.

responsibility really challenges them but also empowers them to share their faith with their kids," says Miriam. "And, though this is probably parents' biggest fear going into this, it is exactly what they are most proud of at the end after a year in the program."

Many parents begin volunteering as catechists when their own children begin first communion sacramental preparation. After the year, few decide to stop their ministry and continue as catechists because they are captivated by the experience. Catechist Estelle Ybarra says that, as a catechist, she is always learning. "I enjoy teaching faith formation and I learn more about my faith and myself in doing so. I didn't think I could be a catechist because I didn't think I knew enough about my faith to teach it," says Estelle. "But there is really no better way to learn about your faith than to become a catechist because you learn as you go and everyone is appreciative of what you can offer."

Miriam attests to this contagious love of catechesis and insures anyone who may be interested that she will only set them up for success. "I provide everything catechists need. They have a

great, easy-to-follow curriculum and I can teach them how to manage a classroom full of kids," says Miriam. "All they need to come with is a love of our faith, a desire to teach that faith to our children, and an openness to learning more."

Catechist Tyler Scheuerman, who started five years ago, agrees that this ministry is a complete joy, one that he shares with his wife Hella. "The most rewarding part of this experience is seeing the kids coming to understand their faith," says

Tyler. "I recommend that interested individuals just jump in because once you're in it's a difficult thing to stop doing. I do this [ministry] with my wife and, as a couple, it makes it even better."

Miriam says that faith formation is a two-way road for learning. "Catechists really love this ministry," she says. "I have people who have been catechists for years and years. What I think most people are excited about is how much they learned in the year—either from the children or from revisiting the faith in the curriculum."

For more information about our First Communion Sacramental Preparation, please contact Miriam Flores at 210.492.4600.

"There is really no better way to learn about your faith than to become a catechist because you learn as you go."
- Estelle Ybarra



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One word should suffice this evening, that is the Cross itself. The Cross is the word through which God has responded to evil in the world. Sometimes it may seem as though God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness. It also reveals a judgment, namely that God, in judging us, loves us. Let us remember this: God judges us by loving us. If I embrace his love then I am saved, if I refuse it, then I am condemned, not by him, but my own self, because God never condemns, he only loves and saves.

Dear brothers and sisters, the word of the Cross is also the answer which Christians offer in the face of evil, the evil that continues to work in us and around us. Christians must respond to evil with good, taking the Cross upon themselves as Jesus did. This evening we have heard the witness given by our Lebanese brothers and sisters: they composed these beautiful prayers and meditations. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to them for this

work and for the witness they offer. We were able to see this when Pope Benedict visited Lebanon: we saw the beauty and the strong bond of communion joining Christians together in that land and the friendship of our Muslim brothers and sisters and so many others. That occasion was a sign to the Middle East and to the whole world: a sign of hope.

We now continue this Via Crucis in our daily lives. Let us walk together along the Way of the Cross and let us do so carrying in our hearts this word of love and forgiveness. Let us go forward waiting for the Resurrection of Jesus, who loves us so much. He is all love!

-Pope Francis, excerpt from address during The Way of the Cross, Good Friday, March 29, 2013, Palatine Hill

Easter Vigil Night of the Resurrection

In the Gospel of this radiant night of the Easter Vigil, we first meet the women who go to the tomb of Jesus with spices to anoint his body (cf. Lk 24:1-3). They go to perform an act of compassion, a tradi-





tional act of affection and love for a dear departed person, just as we would. They had followed Jesus, they had listened to his words, they had felt understood by him in their dignity and they had accompanied him to the very end, to Calvary and to the moment when he was taken down from the cross. We can imagine their feelings as they make their way to the tomb: a certain sadness, sorrow that Jesus had left them, he had died, his life had come to an end. Life would not go on as before. Yet the women continued to feel love, the love for Jesus which now led them to his tomb. But at this point, something completely new and unexpected happens, something which upsets their hearts and their plans, something which will upset their whole life: they see the stone removed from before the tomb, they draw near and they do not find the Lord's body. It is an event which leaves them perplexed, hesitant, full of questions: "What happened?", "What is the meaning of all this?" (cf. Lk 24:4). Doesn't the same thing also happen to us when something completely new occurs in our everyday life? We stop short, we don't understand, we don't know what

to do. Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness which God brings us, the newness which God asks of us. We are like the Apostles in the Gospel: often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God's surprises. Dear brothers and sisters, we are afraid of God's surprises! He always surprises us! The Lord is like that.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up: there are no situations which God cannot change, there is no sin which he cannot forgive if only we open ourselves to him.

-Pope Francis, Easter Vigil homily, Rome, March 30, 2013

All photos by Larry Perry.



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ence. Scheduled at the start of summer, Miriam says that VBS is the perfect way to start the change of routine. "I would encourage anyone to volunteer because it's a lot of fun. It's like a little bit of summer vacation just crammed into one week," says Miriam. "Just the excitement about living and sharing our faith, it's the right jump-start that you need at the beginning for the summer to be steeped in our faith and reminded of God's love."

Deacon Gene wants people to know that anyone can volunteer. "A lot of people might say they can't do this because they can't teach. But kids are not looking for great theologians or even great actors," says Gene. "The kids just need someone to be honest with them, someone who is down-to-earth, able to share their faith, and willing to spend time with them."

Online registration for Vacation Bible School is available May 3 until June 1 on the parish website, www.sfasat.org. The cost per child is \$40.00. Volunteers are asked to pay a \$15 fee to cover supplies and take-home material. For more information about Vacation Bible School, or to learn about volunteer opportunities, please contact Miriam Flores at 210. 492. 4600.

Photos by Don Bernhard.



Teen Confirmations

Confirming Disciples for Service in the Church

Teens eagerly await full initiation into the Catholic faith at the sacrament of confirmation set for May 21 at 7:00 pm. Those who have joined them on this journey say that their example of discipleship gives hope for the future of the Church.

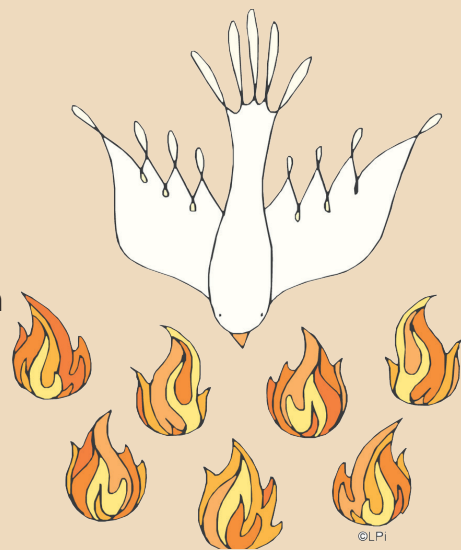
Director of Youth Ministry, Monica Harness, bears witness to the teens' call to service. "The best part is watching the teens who haven't been as involved with the parish actually making a change and getting involved," says Monica. "I love watching their conversion from the beginning of confirmation classes to the end and seeing them get excited about their faith."

Confirmation core team member, Johnny Flores, says this zeal is exactly what the team tries to instill in the teens. "We are trying to provide the teens with good soil," says Johnny. "The

seeds have been sown in them already. We are trying to give them good soil so that good roots can be established as adults in the Catholic faith."

During the confirmation preparation process, the teens participate in several service projects that increase their sense of discipleship. They are required to complete 25 community service hours, which they incorporate into parish-related ministries like Mobile Loaves and Fishes. Their major project for the year is the Living Stations of the Cross that takes place on Good Friday, April 18, at 3:00 pm in the parish courtyard.

Claudia Traa, a parent of one of the confirmandi, attests to the change in her daughter Kendall and her joy to serve others as a disciple of Christ. "Yes, Kendall has always realized that the church is our family space, where



we are dedicated and live out our faith," says Claudia, "but now, confirmation is her choice and her desire to deepen her faith and relationship with Christ."

Confirmation core team member, Debbie Gorday, says that she hopes these teens will carry their discipleship with them throughout their life. "My hope is that this process will bring the teens closer to the church, especially those who haven't had a close relationship with their faith," says Debbie. "I hope they realize how valuable faith is in their life and on their journey."

By volunteering to help make these teens disciples of Christ, volunteers are becoming disciples themselves. Stephanie Bahr, a confirmation core team member, says a volunteer doesn't need to know all the answers. "I don't know all the answers to the teens' questions and I don't know the catechism by heart," says Stephanie. "They don't want to hear verbatim from the text. They want to know how God affected my life and how this recognition helps my life."

Monica agrees and says that all volunteers need is a desire to help. "If they have a desire to work with teens in confirmation, or teens in general, then that's all they need," says Monica. "God will provide the rest. They don't need to be afraid or nervous. All they need is a willing heart."

If you would like to join the confirmation core team, or would like more information about this ministry, please contact Monica Harness at 210. 492. 4600, ext. 216.





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Save the Date

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Apr. 19 | RCIA Easter Vigil Retreat |
| Apr. 20 | Easter Sunday |
| Apr. 26 | Men's Club Golf Tournament |
| Apr. 26 | 1st Communion Family Workshop |
| May 1-4 | Women's ACTS Retreat |
| May 3 | Casino Night |
| May 3 | Online VBS Registration Begins |
| May 3 | Online K-12 Faith Formation
Registration Begins |
| May 21 | Teen & Adult Confirmations |
| Jun. 1 | Women's Council Ice Cream Social |
| Jun. 16-20 | Vacation Bible School |
| Aug. 2 | St. Francis of Assisi Parish Dance |
| Aug. 2-9 | Living Water Mission Trip |
| Aug.
18,19, 20 | Catechist Orientation & Training |

Liturgy Schedule

Weekends

Saturday - 5:00 pm
Sunday - 8:30 am | 11:15 am |
5:00 pm

Weekdays

Mon | Tue | Thur | 8:30 am
Wed | 6:00 pm
Fri | 6:30 am

Liturgy of the Word & Communion Service

Monday - Thursday 6:30 am

Reconciliation

Sat. | 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm