

THE SACRED  
PASCHAL  
TRIDUUM: JESUS'  
PASSION, DEATH, &  
RESURRECTION

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

In this issue, we share reflections from our sisters (and a friar!) as we prepare for these high holy days. Let us join each other at the altar, the cross, and the tomb during this special and sacred time!

**HOLY THURSDAY: EUCHARIST,  
THE POWER FOR CONVERSION**  
BY FR. VINCE YEAGER, T.O.R.



The Paschal Triduum always stands out for me as a privileged opportunity to renew our relationship with the Lord, particularly through our baptism. Within the general vocation of a baptized Catholic, I have been called as a Third Order Regular Franciscan Friar and a priest, so Holy Thursday holds particular gravity for me. At the Mass of the Lord's Supper, initiating the Triduum, we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood. All this is to say it is an opportune time to enter into the mystery of the priesthood, through which we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Eucharist.

With gratitude, I look on the path the Lord placed before my feet to come to this point of being called to serve him in this wonderful way. Along the journey, Jesus has led me and sustained me by the gift of himself in the Eucharist, in Adoration, and especially in receiving Him at Mass. At a young age I began to serve at the liturgy and continued through mid-high school, when I thought I was "too cool" for it. Little did I know!

At the end of high school, I had a personal encounter with Jesus. At a humble prayer group of high school and college kids, I truly met Jesus and couldn't help but give my life to him. Over the next four years, my faith began to grow like the mustard seed in the parable. While studying engineering, Jesus slowly, gently, and absolutely

took over my life. What started as Sunday Mass and going to praise and worship once per week swelled into daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration weekly, confession regularly, daily Scripture reading, daily rosary, teaching religious education to 10th graders, and more! Through the whole process, the Eucharist was the driving force of my conversion. I had a deep sense that God wanted more of me and I wanted to give myself to Him because He had already given himself totally to me. But how to do it?

While helping plan a retreat for a local Catholic high school, I was praying with the team the night before. One of the other team members shared some verses with me from the Gospel of Luke following a prompting from the Holy Spirit. Immediately afterward I had a strong sense that I needed to read the following verses: "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.' You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:45-48, ESV)

When I read these words, I was struck to the heart with a clear conviction that God was calling me to apply to join the T.O.R. friars and hopefully become a priest. Thanks be to God, a few months later, I started the journey to becoming a friar, and eight years later, was ordained a priest!

One lesson from my own journey is to never underestimate the power of the Eucharist to bring about conversion in ourselves and in others. This Holy Thursday, let us reflect on part of a prayer from Saint Francis of Assisi from "A Letter to the Entire Order:"

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!



Fr. Vince is a Franciscan Friar, TOR and currently serves the community as the Director of Formation

## GOOD FRIDAY: IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN DEATH

BY SR. AGNES THERESE DAVIS, T.O.R.

Years ago, a woman whose husband was dying of cancer shared her experience of watching her husband slowly die. There were many busy times when he required care, somber hours that weighed heavily, quiet moments with nothing to do, and also some spontaneous humor. I could tell she was wondering if it was okay to laugh during a death watch.

I thought immediately of the hours Mary spent at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday. I am sure Jesus' Mother's experience was not unlike this woman's. I bet she shed tears as she watched her son die, but perhaps there were also moments of quiet conversation with John and the other Marys. Maybe there were even occasions when she would catch Jesus' eye and suddenly go back, in a flash, to sweeter days long past: family jokes, shared joys, and days and days of life together in Nazareth. Even if she didn't laugh, she very well may have smiled at the memories: just because someone is dying doesn't nullify the life they have lived.

Through the Cross, I was able to offer some comfort to that woman years ago. I've remembered her recently, as



I often pray for the grace to be able to keep a death watch well. This is because there has been more sickness and death in my personal life the past three years than in the preceding 33. Besides that, it seems that a large part of my life in the apostolate could be described as staying with people as they endure various deaths: the death of disappointments, the death of loved ones, of betrayal, of financial setbacks, of addiction... "In the midst of life we are in death" - this is an ancient chant, derived from the book of Job. No matter how happily we may be tripping through life, we are concurrently making our way to our own graves. In my current assignment living among people suffering material poverty, there is little veneer to cover this fact. What remains is to accept life as it is, with confidence that it is a gift.

A woman I met recently through our weekly game nights at the Urban Mission Women's Shelter has been teaching me this receptivity of reality as a gift. She lost her son in a tragic situation last year, and as his birthday approached, she was overwhelmed by sorrow and pain. She asked if we could talk, and as we spoke, she reflected on the joys of her son's life as well as the pain of his loss. "I needed to cry, Sister," she said, "but I was getting lost in my sadness. I needed happy tears too." In the midst of life we are in death. However, in the midst of death, we are in life: all the sadness and loss, but also the preciousness and joy of our earthly exile finds its place and meaning at the cross of Jesus and at his empty tomb. In company with our Sorrowful Mother, we can receive life as a gift.



## EASTER SUNDAY: "PREFERISCO PARADISO"

BY SR. JEAN DAUGHERTY, T.O.R.

As we watched the coffin being lowered into the ground on a sunny day this February, the sisters began singing over and over again "Preferisco Paradiso" ("I prefer heaven"),

as we said a final good-bye to our dear Sr. Grace Anne Wills (previously Holly). The song is from a movie on the life of St. Philip Neri, which quickly became a favorite of Sr. Grace Anne's the first time she saw it. She never tired of repeating "Preferisco Paradiso." Having reached the age of 90 last June, her eyes were

## HOLY SATURDAY: A TIME OF WAITING

BY SR. MIRIAM O'CALLAGHAN, T.O.R.

I have yet to meet a person who likes to wait. As impatient humans (speaking for myself), we don't tend to join the longest lines in the grocery store or exclaim excitedly when we realize that our flight has been delayed.

On Holy Saturday we recall a time when Jesus was in a stance of waiting - waiting in the tomb, awaiting the Resurrection, and waiting to reconnect verbally with his disciples and others.

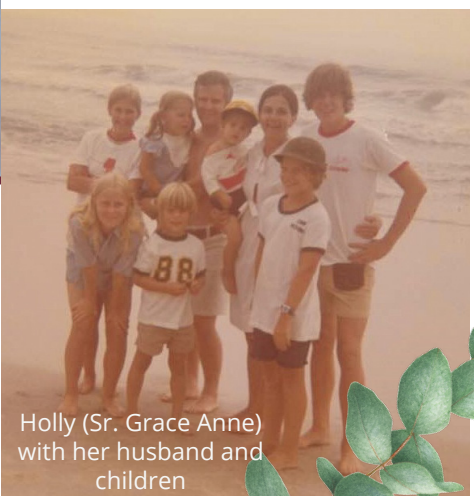
Last December, Mother Della Marie and I spent some time with a group of people who are waiting - waiting for their sentences to be served and awaiting the day that they will rejoin their families and society.

It was a powerful and moving experience for me.

By way of context, some months prior, an inmate (I'll call him 'John') read an article about our sisters in our diocesan newspaper. This led to a correspondence between John and our Reverend Mother over several months. John donated to us from his prison allowance on several occasions.

Last December he let us know that he and his fellow inmates were performing a nativity experience in the prison and we were invited. Upon arrival that day, and after going through the necessary security measures, our small visiting group was led from station to station within the nativity experience. At each station we encountered a new group of inmates.

For example, one station was a marketplace. The men had created a number of impressive market stalls and costumes and were calling out about their wares as we passed through.



Holly (Sr. Grace Anne) with her husband and children

ever focused on her final goal of heaven.

Sr. Grace Anne's life held many changes. One of the biggest was the day she entered our community in January 1997, after living a happily married life for 27 years to Roland Wills, becoming a mother of



They teased Mother Della Marie and me, inviting the other members of the visiting group to "look out for suspicious looking characters" while pointing to the two of us! They also had a self-deprecating theme running through the whole experience, warning us that we "might go to prison" if we didn't do X (such as pay enough tax to get into the town of Bethlehem!).

After proceeding through the nativity experience, we ended up in a room with homemade (warm) cookies and coffee. The prison choir sang carols for us and they invited requests. We had some fun banter with them too between carols. As I sat there on a plastic chair with a cookie in my hand listening to the music, I found myself moved and happy and not being able to fully articulate why.

The word that kept coming to me with relation to the men I saw was "humility." I thought about how often I hide my mistakes (big and small) and minimize them in my own head. These men didn't have that luxury. Their mistakes were detailed in national media and made known to everyone they knew. So often I don't pay for my own mistakes. They were paying for theirs through this time of waiting. But from what I observed (and I appreciate that I witnessed only a fleeting snapshot of their lives and that life in prison is not for the faint of heart) the men were cheerful, accepting, humble, respectful, humorous, and creative.

Their example helped me enter into Lent in a fuller way this year, as we look forward to the celebration of Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday, as we anticipate his Second Coming, and as we navigate our own personal periods of waiting in stores, airports and in convent and prison food lines!



Sr. Grace Anne, TOR

seven children, and then being a widow for 15 years. Holly's life was not an easy one in many ways. Her young life was uprooted several times by her parents moving from one place to another, enduring 23 moves by the age of 19 and attending 11 schools in 12 years.

Holly was baptized Methodist when she was eight years old; her family went to church intermittently and eventually stopped going at all. It was mainly through the influence of a Catholic friend that she found the answer her heart was

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.  
*of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother*  
369 LITTLE CHURCH RD.  
TORONTO, OHIO 43964  
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

If you wish to switch to an electronic newsletter  
or discontinue receiving our newsletters,  
please contact Anna Marino at  
mission@torsisters.org or 740-544-5542 Ext. 115.

NONPROFIT  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT #13  
44629

## SAVE THE DATE!

*Share His Mercy Benefit*  
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2024



We invite you to our upcoming Benefit this fall! You can join us in-person or through live stream. Fr. Joe Freedy from Pittsburgh will be our Mass celebrant. Watch for details in our future newsletters, website, and social media pages. Hope to see you there!

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



searching for in the Catholic Church. In the spring of 1953 she began instructions in the Catholic Faith, and on May 16<sup>th</sup> of that year, just before her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, she made her first confession and received her First Holy Communion.

Her dream for having a more “rooted life” and a home of her own was realized when, in

1954, she married Roland, the man she loved dearly. Raising seven children had its own trials, but the sudden death of her good, kind, and loving husband in 1982 was a devastating blow and a sorrow so deep that it took 11 years for the agony of losing him to subside. It was her strong faith and the support of her children and friends that helped her to make it through those years. In May of 1982, about five months after her husband’s death, Holly heard a powerful prophecy given at a Catholic Charismatic Conference held at Notre Dame University. The words that touched her heart were: “I wish to raise up men and women consecrated to be single for me. ...Accept this gift and allow it to grow in your hearts. I AM

the Bridegroom and I would have you come to know me as the Beloved... Offer your lives to Me and inquire of Me if this gift is for you.” Holly did just that, and 15 years later she entered our community as a postulant. She stated in her vocation story on our website: “Not being able to see my family anytime I desire is one of the sacrifices Our Lord has asked me to make.”

At the reception after Sr. Grace Anne’s funeral, several eulogies were given in her honor. Her son Paul said: “Reflecting back on your beautiful life on earth, what is so remarkable is how you and Dad kept God at the center of everything and allowed Him to shine through, teaching us with your life how important it is to be rooted in Christ.” Her son Greg shared the “10 Beads of Grace” which his mom used to connect him with God each day through prayer. Her oldest child, Anne, shared: “She (her mom) often talked of her longing to go home to be with Jesus. Well Mom, you made it. You’re home!” Her life had many turns, crosses, and sorrows, but her cry at the end continued to be “Preferisco Paradiso!”

