



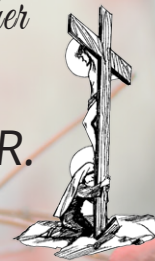
FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.

of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother

from the desk of

Mother Mary Ann Kessler, T.O.R.

CHRISTMAS 2017



Our Hidden Father



Dear Friends,

I imagine you have noticed that Roman Catholic Churches are named after saints, angels, some title of Jesus or perhaps the Holy Spirit. But have you ever come across a church named after God the Father? I have only come across one, and that is at our own Motherhouse—Father of Mercy Chapel (*pictured left*). As a matter of fact, God the Father doesn't even have His own feast day. He is only honored on the liturgical calendar in a particular way once during the year, and that is with Jesus and the Holy Spirit on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

Why is it that we focus so little on Him? I'm sure there is an interesting theological or liturgical explanation of which I am not aware, but the fatherhood of God is undoubtedly widely misunderstood and underappreciated in our world today. Since we first experience the fatherhood of God through our own fathers, I suspect that this has an impact, for better or for worse, on our perspective and relationship with God the Father. Perhaps some of us don't know our own biological fathers. In such a situation, we might feel that God the Father is also distant or absent, or maybe even non-existent. Perhaps we don't have a good relationship with our own fathers. In this case, we might think that God the Father is angry, judgmental, argumentative or some great disciplinarian in the sky. Perhaps we have a great relationship with our own fathers, but never took the time to reflect on fatherhood and its formative impact on our own lives. If we can identify with this, we can grow in recognizing the blessing that it is to have a good father because it makes it easier for us to understand the goodness of our Heavenly Father. Whatever image we may have of God the Father, His fatherhood transcends our experiences of our own earthly fathers because His fatherhood is perfect.

John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life." The word "God" in this passage refers to God the Father. Jesus speaks about God the Father 161 times in the Gospel. He came to reveal Him (*John 8:9; 14:9*), and He tells His disciples that He has come to do the Father's will (*John 14:21*).

God the Father created us out of His eternal, unconditional love (*Genesis 1 & 2; Psalm 139*). He cares for us and nurtures us as His adopted sons and daughters (*2 Corinthians 6:18; Matthew 6:32-33*). He protects us (*John 17:11; Judith 9:14; Psalm 146:9; Proverbs 14:3; Isaiah 38:16; 1 John 5:18*). When we mess up, He forgives us (*John 8:3-11*). No sin is too big for His mercy. We know all this, right? Sure we do... in our heads, but how much do we really grasp it in our hearts? Our Heavenly Father is a loving God who desires to have a relationship with us, a deep and personal relationship.

To Glorify God and Make Known His Merciful Love

It might be good for us to ask ourselves: When was the last time we spoke to God the Father? Do we have a personal relationship with Him? If it's been a while since we've prayed to Him, it would be good for us to take a few minutes and let Him know what is on our minds and how our day went. He wants to know. He wants to be a part of our lives. He cares for us and He loves each of us personally!

We sisters have much for which to be grateful. In June, Sr. Agnes Thérèse Davis made her perpetual profession. In August, Sr. Mary Michelina Belz and Sr. Chiara Joan Riffon professed their first vows; Sr. Mollie Quense entered novitiate; and four new women joined

our community. We have been deeply blessed not only by vocations to our community, but by your generosity. You have provided for us through your time, talent and treasure. Thank you so much! Please consider continuing your support in building up God's kingdom.

Fraternally in Christ,

Mother Mary Ann Kessler, TOR

*Mother Mary Ann Kessler, T.O.R.
Reverend Mother*

THE POWER OF PRAYER CONTINUES

As many of you may already know, the main reason our community was founded (in 1988) was to renew the contemplative dimension of the Franciscan way of life. Therefore, prayer is the priority in our daily lives. Many people in desperation beg for our prayers, and most of these people we never see or hear from again, or at least we don't hear the outcomes of the specific situations that were entrusted to us. But once in a while we get a glimpse into the effects our prayers had on people.

"*The Power of Prayer*" was the theme of our most recent Benefit Banquet (September 16th), and on the heels of this event, I have been privileged to hear about the power of our prayers in the lives of a couple of people.

As I ran into Samaritan House, the thrift store we manage, to pick up another sister, a man caught my eye and said:



Sisters praying over Sr. Chiara Joan and Sr. Mary Michelina (front, center in grey jumpers) before their First Profession of Vows in August.

Sister, I just wanted to tell you about what happened to me since I used to regularly come here years ago. A few years back, due to a change in medication, I got dementia with psychosis—no cure. It was so bad that it affected me physically—my body was starting to shut down and the doctors told me I was dying. I came here and the sisters stood around me and prayed 10 Hail Marys over me. It sounded like angels singing in my ear and I felt a rush of power go through me. I felt like a heavyweight champion, like a resurrected man back from the dead! I got my life back. I'm doing great and am not on any medications. My body and my mind are healed and it's because the sisters prayed over me.

About a week later, there was a woman in our Motherhouse chapel who had red sores and blisters all over her body. She said she had poison sumac and had been suffering from an allergic reaction for three weeks and had gone to the doctors four times to no avail; she was allergic to everything they proposed. In addition to the sores, one of her knees was very swollen and she was limping. She was afraid that by nightfall she wouldn't even be able to walk. She came to us in total desperation, at her wit's end with pain in her face, asking for our prayers. A couple of us prayed over her for healing. We told her to thank Jesus in faith for the healing work that He was doing in her.

She came back to our chapel the next evening, and I could see from a distance that her skin looked greatly improved! Her face looked happy and peaceful as well. She had applied a little natural home remedy that helped, but the improvement looked well beyond what a little oatmeal could have done. The part that she was most excited about was that the swelling had disappeared and her knee was back to normal! She demonstrated the improvement by walking around for us. She said that at 4:00 in the morning she woke up in a cold sweat. Interestingly enough, I remember waking up at 4:00 myself, looking at the clock, praying for her, and going back to sleep. She said that when she was ready to get out of bed, she reached for her cane, thinking she would need it, only to find that her knee was fine!

I hope that these anecdotes boost your faith as it boosted ours and that you encounter the power of prayer in your own lives!

*In His mercy,
Sr. Joan Paule Portenlanger, T.O.R.*

SISTER SPOTLIGHT: *Sr. Philomena Clare De Hitta*



Back row: John, Jenny, and Jane
Front row: Sara, Joe, Sr. Philomena Clare, and Christine

Name: Sr. Philomena Clare De Hitta

City, State: Ellicott City, Maryland

Home Parish: Church of the Resurrection

Years in the Community: 4 years

What do you do in the community?

I'm living and coordinating the kitchen at Heart of Mary, which also means that I help with all of the ministries in downtown Steubenville. I work three times a week at Samaritan House and I coordinate the kitchen at LAMP: planning the meals, shopping, and cooking.

What do you like most about your community position?

In my ministry at Samaritan House in downtown Steubenville, the Lord has shown me that it just comes down to love. We have our Samaritan House family and LAMP family. Any person could do this, but there's something about a consecrated person serving another person. They can tell it's different, and they can receive it as God's particular love for them. I just love being a part of Jesus' mission to love the poor and serve their needs.

I love cooking. It's my passion, my love language. It is such a blessing that I've been able to work with food a lot. My mom got us in the kitchen when we were

really little. I was always the one in my family who would make special treats at holidays. Out of obedience, I would do anything the community asked me to do, but it's such a gift that the Lord is asking me to love through food.

What is your family like?

I have one brother and three sisters, and I'm the second to youngest. My brother is the oldest, which worked out for him because there are four of us girls, so we always outnumbered him. He could always try to play the oldest card, but it didn't do him too much good. We were just so outspoken that he usually didn't get his way on things. We're all really close. We were homeschooled, so I think that helped. We were each other's classmates and playmates for a long time. I remember my mom doing so much to make sure that we had a strong understanding of our faith. And my dad is the one who brought me into the charismatic faith life. As a kid growing up, we didn't have charismatic expression. But then in high school, my dad wanted to go to charismatic worship. I never would have gone if not for my dad. I was totally freaked out. I had the typical Catholic reaction to charismatic: 'Oh my gosh! What are we doing here! Does the Pope know?' Those years of formation have led to these past years of formation as a sister, and I've seen the Lord bless my parents through my yes. I know that my vocation is for all of my spiritual children, but in a particular way for my family.

What's your favorite prayer/form of prayer?

There was a prayer in the Magnificat last year for St. Teresa of Calcutta's canonization. When I was assigned to Heart of Mary, I felt that I needed to learn how to love. I sensed the Lord saying, "Learn from my Mother." This prayer asks Mary for her heart. It's my prayer before communion because it talks about receiving Jesus in the Eucharist and loving Him as Mary loved Him and serving Him in the distressing disguise of the poor:

Mary, Mother of Jesus, give me your heart, so beautiful, so pure, so Immaculate, so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the Bread of Life, love Him as you loved Him, and serve Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor.

JESUS IN DISGUISE

I see Jesus once a week at Samaritan House. We can smell him when he comes into the store. He wears a hooded sweatshirt and layers of clothes. He has a ruddy face, gray beard, swollen fingers, and leaves a trail of twigs, bark, and pine needles behind him as he walks and wherever he sits. He's beautiful to me. His name is Mike. He's homeless if you haven't guessed that already. He sleeps under pine trees and comes in each week for clothes. He doesn't have anywhere to keep them, besides all the ones he can put on his body, and people steal them. Mike is Jesus to me—in disguise. When Mike stops in we usually pray together. I hold his hands and can feel the calluses, the scabs—his hands are like dried leather. Sometimes he cries after we pray. He always says thank you, and I thank him.



I feel my poverty the most in these meetings with Mike. There is nothing I can give him to "fix" him. I can't go and buy him a meal, or pay for a hotel for him—I have no money. I only have me—to be present to him, to hold his hands, to pray with him. To tell him that God loves him. I wonder if Mike knows that. Does he know that God loves him when someone takes his clothes? Does he know God loves him when it is raining and cold at night and the pine tree is not keeping him warm? St. Teresa of Calcutta said that the most terrible poverty is the feeling of loneliness and being unloved. I ask you to pray for Mike—to pray that he feels and knows that God loves him and that He is his good Father. This is a gift we can all give to Mike and to all those who are Jesus in disguise.

~Sr. Mary Michelina Belz, T.O.R.

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Sr. Sarah Rose and Sr. Maria Clare praying with Mark and Carol at our 2017 Benefit Banquet.

Thank You!

We joyfully thank Mark and Carol Nehrbas for their generous support of our community. Your gifts of treasure and prayer go back to our beginnings. We are blessed to have your faithful friendship and to bring your intentions to the Lord.

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"To Glorify God and Make Known His Merciful Love"



UPCOMING EVENTS



#GivingTuesday
 Help the Nuns Run!



Whether it's Sr. Anna Rose running her weekly miles, or Sr. Carrie Ann walking as she meditates on the *Magnificat*, our sisters work out at least three times a week. Counting our entire convent of more than 20 sisters, that's over 3,500 miles in one year! But the treadmills we have right now have been repaired to the point that they cannot be repaired again—

one of them is literally burning rubber. In the winter months, or on our many rainy days, we need an indoor option. This physical fitness is really important not only for our physical well-being, but also for our spiritual health. We join our exercise with rosaries, spontaneous prayer, or spiritual reading, so our time on the treadmill truly is "total body prayer." Please help us this Giving Tuesday, November 28th, to raise money for two new treadmills. Donate early with the remit envelope or go online to: franciscansisterstor.weshareonline.org/GivingTuesday2017



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