



Sharing the Catholic Journey

Discovering faith, joy, and community

February/March 2017

St. John the Apostle Parish, Bloomington, IN

Fr. Daniel Mahan, Pastor

Sharing the Catholic Journey is a bimonthly newsletter for the parishioners of St. John the Apostle Parish. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please write to: sawyerdenise@yahoo.com

Meet...

**Mike and Megan Ripley
with Henry,
Jack, and Katelyn**



Mike was born in Erie, Pennsylvania. His family moved around a bit before they finally settled in Ellettsville when he was about 12 years old. He graduated from Edgewood High School in 2000. Megan was born and raised in Bloomington and was a graduate of Bloomington High School South, also in 2000. Both attended IU, and in 2004 Megan graduated with a degree in Informatics; Mike graduated a year later with a degree in Finance.

They first met through mutual friends during their senior year at IU, although "Megan wasn't really into Mike at the time." Two years later they "re-met" at a friend's wedding. They have now been married for nine years.

Mike grew up as a cradle Catholic. In fact, he has been a parishioner of St. John's since his family first moved to Ellettsville. After their wedding, Megan went through RCIA at St. Christopher Catholic Church in Speedway, IN. She was baptized, confirmed and took her first communion on April 12, 2009. Their first child, Henry, was baptized with her at the same time. Today they have three children: Henry (Hank) 8; Jack, 6; and Katelyn, 4.

They bought their first house on the Westside of Indianapolis. At the time, Megan worked for a Cisco consulting company in Carmel as a network engineer. Mike was working in Greenwood. They moved back to Bloomington in 2009 and lived on the southside. They eventually built a home in Ellettsville in 2011. Although when they moved to Bloomington, Megan worked for Cook Medical as a network administrator, she is currently working for the federal government as an IT auditor. Mike

has been with the federal government since graduating from college, and he is in data protection as a Disclosure Enforcement Specialist.

We love to travel...as a family. Both Mike and Megan travel all over the country for work, and when they can, they align the work travel with a trip for the whole family. Two years ago they bought a camper and really enjoy camping as much as they can. Their first camping trip was a three-week trip to New England. They are big fans of IU sports and the Steelers and try to attend many of their events.

**Michael and Stephanie Noth
with Katherine,
John, and Paul**



Mike grew up near Lawrenceburg, IN, which is a suburb of Cincinnati, OH. He went to Indiana University and received an accounting degree. After graduation, he moved to Indianapolis and worked for the State of Indiana for almost 2 years, and then took a job with Indiana University. He has worked for 14 years at both the Bloomington and Indianapolis campuses. Stephanie grew up in San Diego until the age of 14, and moved with her family to Indianapolis at that time. She went to IUPUI as an education major and worked in college at the Center for Young Children on that campus

Stephanie and Mike met on a blind date in October 2004. He had done some work for Stephanie's boss at the time and she thought that they would be a good match. Apparently she was right. They were married in 2007 at St. Thomas More, in Mooresville, which was their parish home before St. Johns. They have 3 children: Katherine, 8; John, 6; and Paul, 4.

They moved to Stinesville from the Mooresville area in the fall of 2014 to be closer to the Bloomington campus and move to a more rural area. After staying home to raise the kids while they were small, Stephanie decided to go back to work and became a 5th grade teacher at Stinesville Elementary last year. When we aren't spending time as a family at home, we enjoy growing our own food, visiting state parks, and youth sports.

Catholicism 101...

By Mark Hornbacher

Faith (Part 1 of 3)



“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Greetings! Since this is my first time writing for this column, I decided to write about something that is absolutely foundational to our lives of faith: Faith! The phenomenon of faith is often greatly misunderstood; not only by those without faith, but also by many believers. Even some of us, reading this column, may not be clear on it.

So what’s the misunderstanding? It goes something like this: Religious faith is a deep, personal feeling that leads you to believe things as true, which have little or no evidence – an essentially irrational, or un-rational impulse. Believers who hold something like this view of course still tend to see faith as a good thing, for it connects you to God; but for them it is a gift of grace alone, and has little or nothing to do with reason. Unbelievers who hold this view of faith, on the other hand, tend to see faith as a bad thing, precisely because it is seen as contrary to reason.

Then what is the right way to understand faith? Although religious faith, for the Catholic, is a gift of grace, it is also not very different from a very common, natural kind of faith. Simply put: **faith is the acceptance of the word of another, based on the conviction that they know what they’re talking about, and are trustworthy.**

When seen in this way, faith is shown to be intimately connected with reason. **In fact, faith is built upon reason, and reason is built upon faith.** To explain what I mean, I’ll focus on natural faith: When we put our faith in the word of other persons (like parents, teachers, friends, scientists, journalists, strangers, etc.), we do so based on evidence that they are, indeed, worthy of our faith – at least, if our faith is well placed. If our faith *is* well placed in a person, we can give good reasons, when asked, why we placed our faith in their word. For example, if I am asked why I believe what Father Mahan tells me about his ministry as a priest before being assigned to St. John’s, I could say that I have no reason to doubt him – I have knowledge of no motive

for him to lie, nor of any claim (credible or otherwise) that he actually is lying. Furthermore, information could be obtained relatively easily from the Archdiocese and by previous assignments – which makes it even more unlikely that he would lie on such matters. Finally, I can say that in all my dealings with him, nothing that he has told me has proven false, and that he has shown himself to be a man of high moral character. *My reasons show that it is reasonable to put my faith in the word of Fr. Mahan about his priestly ministry.*

Do you see, then, how faith is built on reason? Now let’s consider how reason is built on faith.

In order to do their own work, scientists and other researchers often must have faith in work done by others. Imagine that I want to scientifically determine the best way to train athletes to run the 400-meter dash. I am going to need LOTS of data/information, to tell me which training routines are the best currently available, and what kinds of changes are most likely to improve a routine. I need sufficiently large samplings of athletes, repeated multiple times, so that I can be reasonably sure that it is the training routine that makes the average 2 second difference, rather than some other factor. Could the science here develop very far, if each researcher had to start from scratch – gathering all the data for themselves, re-testing things already done again and again by those before them? Of course not – research builds upon research; discovery builds upon discovery. For human knowledge to progress, scientists and thinkers of all kinds need to make reasonable acts of faith in others.

Christian faith works much the same way as natural faith. **It, too, is acceptance of the word of another (God) based upon the conviction that He knows what He is talking about, and is trustworthy.** Which means, of course, that Christian faith ought to be reasonable, and that no person ought to embrace faith unless it is reasonable for them to do so.

Next time, in part two of this treatment of faith, we will look at some of the main ways in which an act of faith in Christ is a reasonable act to make. What are some of the real-world, rational bases upon which we build our faith in Christ? What is the most important one?

(Stay tuned for part 2)

Lenten Traditions...

The Resurrection of Jesus happened in the spring, and so it was natural that as the Christian faith spread, some traditions from the pre-Christian world would be incorporated into the Christian traditions as a way of bring them into the faith.

Man and Nature

Spring is a time of renewal, of new life springing up after the cold, dark winter. Ancient nature rites date back to the “spring lore” of the Indo-European races. The period from the winter solstice until spring was a continuous tradition of spring rites. To ancient peoples, winter was an enemy to be fought until warm weather returned once again. They would attempt to scare away the “demons of winter” by wearing strange costumes and masks, racing around their villages, making loud noises.

As spring was beginning to appear, they would often celebrate ‘winter’s burial.’ They would often create a large straw figure that they would drag through the town. By the 16th century in Europe, they began to stuff the large straw creation with gunpowder and fireworks.

A Personal Note:

We experienced that same ancient tradition when we were living in Zurich, Switzerland in 1979. There it is called Sechselauten, celebrating the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Traditionally celebrated on the 3rd Monday of April, the festivities begin with a parade. Citizens of all ages wear medieval-style clothing, and a large snowman, called Boogg, made of flammable material, is carried by a horse-drawn wagon through the streets.



Everyone heads to an open area near the shore of Lake Zurich. Boogg is then mounted at the top of a large pile of twigs and straw stuffed with firecrackers and gunpowder. Once the fire is lit, the sooner the firecrackers start going off, the faster winter will be chased away.



As the spectators gathered in a circle, men from the various guilds galloped on horseback around the burning snowman. We didn't stay until the very end. Because we were with the American Consulate in Zurich, we had front-row seats. When the firecrackers started to go off, it was much too scary for our three-year-old son and we quickly left.



Farewell to Alleluia When Lent begins, we no longer say “Alleluia” during our Masses. This word has special meaning for the Church because it is one of the few Hebrew words adopted by the Church. It means “Praise the Lord!” Mentioned by St. John in Revelations, its use spread widely, used in private devotions. Interestingly, in the Roman Empire, it was the favorite song of oarsmen. It still inspires people today.

Preparation for Lenten Fasting

Lent became a period of fasting, of repentance. The Greek Church began the tradition of the Lenten fast earlier than the Roman Church did, and so the Church set aside the Sundays before Lent began to help the people to prepare. At that time, the law of abstinence was quite strict, including many foods besides meat, including butter, milk, eggs, and cheese. The clergy and much of the laity would begin abstaining from foods progressively until the Great Fast began.

The Orthodox Church continues that tradition. Two weeks before Lent begins, they celebrate Meatfare Sunday. This is the last day they eat meat until Easter.

The following Sunday is Cheesefare Sunday, the last day they eat dairy food, including eggs.



The Sunday before Lent in the Western Church was called Dominica carnevala, (Farewell-to-meat) Sunday. From this we get the tradition of Carnival, a time to eat and drink and enjoy life before the Lenten sacrifices would begin. The German word for carnival, “Fasching” or “Faschnach” describes it quite accurately: “running around crazily.” Just as the ancient peoples wore costumes and masks to scare away winter, Fasching and Mardi Gras celebrations also include the wearing of costumes and masks; they are very much a part of the carnival tradition, no matter where it's celebrated. Traditionally, the day for such festivities was on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. That day is often called Fat Tuesday, and in French, Mardi Gras.

Traces of this tradition remain with us today with the many pancake breakfasts planned by churches and families on this Tuesday before Lent begins. Many Catholics today don't realize the significance of eating pancakes on this day. It can seem like an odd tradition today since most people continue eating all of the ingredients that go into making pancakes. However, among earlier Christians (and still today with many Orthodox), what better way is there to use up all of the butter, eggs, and milk on hand before Lent begins than by making pancakes? It is a sweet tradition to continue.



Carnival Madness/Ash Wednesday

Found in a letter written in 1592 by a Spanish ambassador at the court of Sultan Suleiman in Constantinople is the anecdote that a certain Turkish official traveled through some European countries and observed the carnival festivities in one of them. When he returned home, he reported to the sultan that "at a certain time of the year the Christians went raving mad, but that a mysterious powder of ashes sprinkled on them by their priests would instantly restore them to sanity and heal them from all their madness."

Some of the popes were concerned about the excesses of Carnival. Pope Benedict XIV (1758) wrote that he had received complaints from some of the bishops "people who had reveled all night would appear in church on Ash Wednesday morning still dressed in their carnival costumes, remove the masks to receive the ashes, then go home and spend the rest of the day in bed to recover from their excesses."

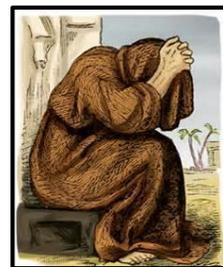


Sackcloth and Ashes

The use of ashes as a token of penance and sorrow is an ancient one. Christ mentions it in Matthew 11: 21: "They would have long ago repented in sackcloth and ashes." The Church accepted this Jewish tradition, and as early as the third century, Tertullian mentions the use of ashes as one of the external marks of penance, and by the fourth century, public penance had spread throughout the Christian world. It seems quite harsh compared to our practices today.

Public sinners presented themselves to their priests to accuse themselves of their sins, and on Ash Wednesday, the priests would present them to the bishop. Each was

assigned a particular penance, depending on the severity of the sin. Following the bishop into the church, they, along with the priests and the bishop, recited the "Seven Penitential Psalms." Then the bishop would sprinkle them with holy water, toss ashes on them, and present them with a hair shirt to wear during Lent.



Although the ashes were initially only for the public sinners, many devout people chose to receive them as well, and by the 11th century it was a common practice in all of the European countries. The name Ash Wednesday was officially introduced by Pope Urban II (1099); earlier that day had simply been called "Beginning of the Fast." From the beginning, the ashes used came from the blessed palms of the previous Palm Sunday.

What are the Seven Penitential Psalms?

Also called the Psalms of Confession, they include Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. It's believed that they are the Psalms David prayed when he repented his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. First named in a commentary in the 6th century written by Cassiodorus, a Roman statesman and writer, all seven Psalms express sorrow for sin. St. Augustine of Hippo had first named four of them as "Penitential Psalms" in the early 5th century.



The Great Fast

Fasting traditions were introduced gradually, but by the time of the Council of Nicea (325), there was reference to a forty-day fasting period. By the 6th century, it was clearly a Lenten practice.

Initially, there were different forms of fasting and abstinence, but gradually the guidelines were more clarified. Pope Saint Gregory the Great in 604 announced, "We abstain from flesh meat and from things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese, eggs." Remarkably, this was the norm for the Church for nearly 1000 years. There was also a tradition of eating only one meal a day, usually late in the day, and only water to drink. However, despite the strictness of the fast, the Church never demanded it for all Christians. As St. John Chrysostom (407) wrote, "If your body is not strong enough to continue fasting all day, no wise man will reprove you; for we serve a gentle and merciful Lord who expects nothing of us beyond our strength." Today, the guidelines for both fasting and abstinence have eased, although both are still encouraged during Lent.

Customs of Lent

Pretzels During Lent, Christians in the Roman Empire made a special dough consisting of flour, salt and water (since fat, eggs, and milk were forbidden). They shaped it in the form of two arms crossed in prayer to remind them that Lent was a time of prayer. Called *bracellae*, "little arms," the Germans later called them "*brezel*" or "*prezel*." They remained a Lenten food throughout Europe. It's only in the last century or so that pretzel has become available all year. Most people have forgotten it's significance in the past.



Mourning Mourning was always an important feature of Lent. People would give up certain pleasures or entertainments. In the past, both men and women would wear dark clothing. "Even within the liturgy this mourning was clearly expressed: no flowers decorated the altars, the organs went silent, weddings and other solemnities were banned, and the liturgical colors (purple and black) proclaimed the spirit of penance and grief."

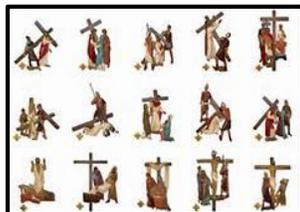
Confession The "Easter confession" is still singled out as a solemn rite. The Church provides special events for the parishioners such as missions, spiritual exercises and retreats. These give parishioners an opportunity for more reflection.



Laetare Sunday The fourth Sunday in Lent is a day of joy within the Lenten season. Pope Innocent III explained the reason for our joy in a sermon in 1216: "On this Sunday, which marks the middle of Lent, a measure of consoling relaxation is provided, so that the faithful may not break down under the severe strain of Lenten fast but may continue to bear the restrictions with a refreshed and easier heart."

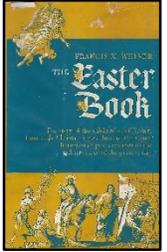
Interestingly, in Germany, Austria and a few other areas, Laetare Sunday used to be the day of announcing engagements of young people. In Ireland, the whole Lenten season was the traditional time for matchmaking, with the elders discussing the possibilities of matching their sons and daughters.

Lenten Devotions The most popular devotion is the Stations of the Cross, which had its origin during the time of the Crusades when the knights and pilgrims began to follow in prayerful meditation the route of Christ's way to Calvary.



Through the efforts of the Franciscan friars in the 14th and 15th centuries, it developed into the form we know today and spread throughout Europe. Today the Stations of the Cross continues to be popular, and at St. John the Apostle, we gather every Friday during Lent to pray it together.

NOTE: The source for this article is a book written by Francis X. Weiser in 1954, *The Easter Book*, with the rather lengthy subtitle "The story of the celebration of Easter, from early Christian ties through the varied festivals of the past centuries to the observance of the present," is a fascinating look at the Lenten practices that we continue today, as well as those that we have fallen away from.



Saint Patrick's Day, March 17

This saint's feast seems to always be during Lent, but many Catholics and non-Catholics celebrate the day in various ways, including enjoying beer, Irish music, and turning local rivers green.

St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer (abridged)



As I arise today,
may the strength of God pilot me,
the power of God uphold me,
the wisdom of God guide me....
May Christ shield me today.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,
Christ when I stand,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen

Doctors of the Church

Tuesday, February 22: Memorial of Saint Peter Damian 1007 – 1072



Throughout the past two thousand years, the Church has often been in need of reform, not because the Church's teachings were in error but because God has entrusted His Church to human beings who have a natural inclination to sin, called

"concupiscence." For that reason, in every generation, God has raised up men and women to correct, to teach, to get the Church back on track. These men and women are often declared saints.

One such man was St. Peter Damian who was born in 1007 in Ravenna, Italy. An outstanding scholar, he taught at the University of Piacenza. However, he preferred the life of a hermit in the Camaldolensian monastery of Avellana. Despite that personal preference, he was called on to assist first his bishop and then the Pope Leo IX with some of the problems facing the Medieval Church at that time.

It was a period of ecclesiastical abuses and political intrigue in the Church, as well as a lack of chastity among many priests and brothers; St. Peter Damian took a public stand on these issues and urged priests to adopt a life of both poverty and chastity. One of his treatises was called *Book of Gomorrah*, a repudiation of the clerical behavior at the time. Written in a very blunt way, it was clearly understood by those for whom it was intended. It is sometimes called a "blue print for the moral life in our time." He left behind 66 other treatises, as well as seven letters, many sermons, and hymns. He would eventually be named bishop and then cardinal. He died in 1072.

What's happening in February...

Wednesday, February 8: Memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita

When she was nine years old, Josephine was kidnapped from her home in Sudan, and forced to march for eight days before she was sold into slavery. She would have five cruel masters before she was eventually sold to an Italian diplomat who bought her and took her to Venice. There she experienced kindness for the first time



since her kidnapping as a child. She was entrusted to the care of the Canossian Sisters of Charity who introduced her to God. Entering their order, she served God in humble ways until her death in 1947. She once said, "The whole of my life has been God's gift, men, His instruments; thanks to them for providing me the gift of faith."

She was canonized by Saint Pope John Paul II on October 1, 2000. At the canonization Mass he said, "In Josephine Bakhita we find a shining example of genuine emancipation. The history of her life inspires not passive acceptance but the firm resolve to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights."

ANTIPHON: Here is a wise virgin, from among the number of the prudent, who went forth with lighted lamp to meet Christ.

Friday, February 10: Memorial of Saint Scholastica

St. Scholastica is believed to have been the twin sister of St. Benedict, who was the founder of the Benedictine Order. They were born in Norcia, Italy, in about 480, and although they lived only a short distance away from each other, she in a monastery for nuns and he in nearby Monte Cassino, they would only meet once a year in a nearby house. In 542, they met for the last time. She begged him to spend the night so that they could have more time together, but he insisted that he must return to the monastery. She prayed to God that her brother would stay with her, and a great thunderstorm prevented his leaving. She died a few days later.



ANTIPHON: I am like a growing olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God, for ever and ever.

Saturday, February 11: Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes

On this date 159 years ago in the village of Lourdes, France, a 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, met a beautiful woman who appeared in a stone grotto known as the "pigs' shelter," wearing a dazzling white dress with a blue sash. A month later, she revealed, "I am the Immaculate



Conception." Four years earlier, Pope Pius IX had declared the dogma that Mary had been immaculately conceived in her mother's womb. However, the young girl who would one day be canonized as Saint Bernadette, was an uneducated young woman. She had never heard the phrase "immaculate conception." A spring of healing waters appeared in the grotto, and it has been a favorite pilgrimage site since that day, receiving six million visitors every year.

ANTIPHON: Hail, Holy Mother, who gave birth to the King who rules heaven and earth for ever.

Wednesday, February 22: Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle

This feast emphasizes the importance of the mission that Jesus entrusted to Peter. "On this rock, I will build my church." At one time, the feast was celebrated on two different days. One day honored the chair at Antioch, where the Christian church first gained a stronghold; this was before Peter went to Rome. The second, of course, honors the importance of the papacy, the Chair of Peter, in the Church. It represents the Magisterium, the teaching branch of the Church, and the pope's mission to guide and to teach the entire Church.



ANTIPHON: The Lord says to Simon Peter: I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

NOTE: The interesting thing about this Scripture passage is that although Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail, He already knew that Peter would deny Him three times after His arrest. However, He prayed that although Peter's courage had failed him, his faith would remain and he would become a source of strength for the others.

What's happening in March...

Wednesday, March 1: Ash Wednesday



Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.



On Ash Wednesday, we are reminded that our lives on earth will end. Lent gives us an opportunity to focus more on our spiritual life and our

relationship with God through prayer, fasting, and charity.

Pope Gregory I (604) described Lent as "the spiritual tithing of the year." "A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain me. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise." Psalm 51

ANTIPHON: You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God.

Three of the saints featured from the March church calendar all shared a love of those most in need – the ill, the poor, the marginalized.

Friday, March 3: Memorial of Saint Katharine Drexel

St. Katherine Drexel was born into a wealthy family in Philadelphia in 1858. After the death of her mother shortly after she was born, she and her sister, as well as a stepsister, were raised by their father and stepmother. It was a family life filled with great faith. Educated at home with tutors, they were taught that their wealth was to be shared with those in need. Three afternoons a week, their stepmother Emma opened their doors to serve the needs of the poor. As the girls grew older, they assisted her in handing out food, clothing and money to those in need.



On a trip to the Northwest with their father before his death, St. Katherine had the opportunity to witness a need that was not being met for the American Indians and the African-Americans. When her father died leaving his daughters a huge estate, she began endowing small schools on the reservations around the country. When she urged Pope Leo XIII to send more missionaries to the Native Americans, he urged her to become a missionary herself. She accepted the challenge. She first joined an established religious order, but she eventually started her own, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

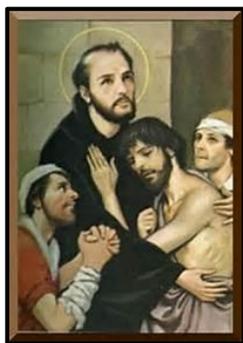
She used her great wealth to fund many projects, including a donation of \$750,000 toward the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first Catholic college for African-Americans. She was responsible for building over 100 schools in cities and suburbs and for Native

Americans. She died in 1955 at the age of 100. By the time of her death, she had given away her entire fortune.

ANTIPHON: The Lord chose her for his spouse with a loyal, compassionate love that will last for ever.

Wednesday, March 8: Memorial of Saint John of God

St. John of God was born João Duarte Cidade on March 8, 1495, into a poor family in Portugal. When he was eight years old, he disappeared from his home. History isn't clear if he had been kidnapped or ran away, but he soon found himself homeless and living on the streets in Spain. He was eventually taken in by a man who hired him to shepherd his sheep. It was a job that he became comfortable with, returning to it from time to time.



He became a soldier for a while, then a bookseller before eventually returning to life as a soldier, spending years as a trooper in Europe, fighting the Turks in Hungary. Eventually, he left the military life behind to go to Africa to help the Christians who were enslaved there. Poorly treated by their captors, he helped to care for them, to nurse them. He experienced a major religious conversion on St. Sebastian's Day (January 20) in 1537 while listening to a sermon by St. John of Avila, who became his spiritual director. He was encouraged to continue to try to improve the life of the poor.

After what was thought to be an acute mental breakdown at 42, he was incarcerated in a hospital reserved for the mentally ill. The treatment at the time was to be segregated, chained, flogged, and starved. St. John of Avila visited him there and encouraged him to get involved in tending to the needs of others rather than focusing on his own hardships. He found peace and left the hospital shortly afterwards to begin his work with the poor.

A dedicated group of followers soon gathered around him to assist with his work with the poor, the sick, the mentally ill. He organized them into the Order of Hospitallers. He died in Granada on March 8, 1550, at the age of 55. Twenty-two years after his death, they were approved by the pope as the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God who care for the sick in countries around the world. Today they are a worldwide Catholic religious institution that is dedicated to the care of the poor, sick, and those suffering

From mental disorders. They have a presence in 53 countries with more than 300 hospitals. One special honor is that this Order has been officially entrusted with the medical care of the Pope.

ANTIPHON: This man will receive blessings and compassion from the Lord God, his Savior, for this is the reward of those who seek the Lord.

Thursday, March 9: Memorial of Saint Frances of Rome

Like St. Katherine Drexel, who lived 500 years later, St. Frances of Rome was also born into a wealthy and pious family in 1358.



Although she knew when she was eleven that she wanted to become a nun, her father had already promised her in marriage to the commander of the papal troops in Rome. The marriage that took place a year later, and it lasted for 40 years until his death. An exemplary wife and mother, she devoted herself to prayer and acts of charity. However, there was sorrow in her life for she lost two children to the plague.

With her sister-in-law, she visited the poor and took care of the sick, inspiring other wealthy women to do the same. When her mother-in-law died, she became the mistress of the household and in times of famine or flood, she turned part of the country estate into a hospital and distributed food and clothing. It was a time when Rome was largely in ruins.

During her marriage, she tried to live a life of contemplation when she wasn't engaged in acts of charity. In 1425, she founded the Olivetan Oblates of Mary, a confraternity of pious women who were neither cloistered nor bound by formal vows. They could follow her pattern of combining a life of prayer while still answering the needs of their family, of society. In March 1433, she founded a monastery to allow for a common life for those women who most desired it.

She remained with her husband, nursing him through his final illness. When he died in 1436, she followed her heart, entering the monastery and becoming the superior.

ANTIPHON: The Lord chose her for his spouse with a loyal, compassionate love that will last for ever.