

Blessings

celebrating the
Joy of Faith

A ceramic figurine of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child, surrounded by white flower petals.

**Lord, Teach Us
To Pray**

**A Legacy of
God's Grace**

Joy

Love is greater than
any sorrow or sadness

**Lost
and Found**

**Create Your
Own Gift Tags**

The Ultimate Gift

*“For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 9:6

*M*edia often bombards us with amazing gift ideas, the newest trends, and what we need to have in our lives to be happy. However, we have already received the ultimate gift and we often forget that. In Christ, God has given us the best gift ever! Our God became man, was sent to earth and walked among us! He is a God who can understand the woes and hardships of His people, he came to live among us and gave his life for our salvation.

In this season as we remember the birth of our Saviour, we give gifts to one another to celebrate his life, his birth, and his love for us! There is power in giving! There is a beauty that exudes from acts of kindness as we give our time, our love, our energy, and ourselves to those around us. It is time to start to exemplify what Christ did, and fully and give with all of our hearts

In this issue we hope that you are able to see what a gift giving is! How small actions can change the course of a persons day or even someone's life. As we learn to put the same type of love into our actions that Christ did for us I am sure that our hearts will open, and the light of Christ will shine through to all those we encounter.

“For it is in giving that we receive” – St Francis

Pax Tibi,
Daniela Di Panfilo



Contents

Winter 2012 / 2013

Editor's Note	DANIELA DI PANFILO	3
For It Is In Giving That We Receive	ROSE TARANTINI	6-7
Coincidence?	JOAN SIMONE	10-11
The Immaculate Conception	RYAN ATTARD	12-13
Joy	FATHER ERNESTO DECICCIO	14-15
Lost and Found	CHRISTOPHER DEJULIIS MOTTA	18-19
Ethiopia: Teach us to Love	CELIA IERADI	20-21
Easy Homemade Christmas Tags	MARIAH CESTRA	22
Lord, Teach Us To Pray	TONY WHELAN	23
A Legacy of God's Grace	DEACON CARLOS NOGUEIRA	24-27
Are Prayers Heard?	ILLUSTRATED BY TONY TARANTINI	28

The opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily represent those of the Blessings Committee. *Blessings* Magazine is published by a group of Catholic women volunteers.

If you would like to submit an article for our next issue please send us an email at www.blessingsmagazine.ca

Bible quotes from The New Revised Standard Version.

© 2012 Women of the Word Toronto

Sponsors & Benefactors

- Bijoux - Jewelry by Patrizia Abballe ~ 416 670 6073
- Celestina Cappuccitti ~ May the love of God fill your hearts.
- Dizennio Floral ~ www.dizenniofloral.com
- Marin Media Group ~ www.marinmediagroup.com
- Nirvana Beauty Centre - Lidia DiBono ~ 905-265-9782
- St. David's Catholic Women's Society
- St. Patrick's Wildfield Catholic Women's League
- St. Peter's Fraternity - Come and See ~ www.ofsstpeters.com
- Simply Sienna - www.facebook.com/simplysiennas ~ simplysiennas@gmail.com
- Tony Whelan - Author of "Lord, Teach us to Pray" ~ wwwcreatespace.com/3827249
- Women of the Word- Toronto ~ womenofthewordtoronto@gmail.com

Blessings Committee

Publisher	MARY FILANGI
Associate Publisher	CHERI NATALE
Editor in Chief	DANIELA DI PANFILO
Editor	ANNE MACINNES
Creative Director	CELIA IERADI
Graphic Designer	VANESSA RICO
Spiritual Director	DEACON STEVE DI MAURO

A special thank you to Mariah Cestra as a graphic design assistant.

Cover set-up by SimplySienna. Flowers by Dizennio Floral.

If you are a graphic designer and would like to join our dedicated team of volunteers please contact us on our website at www.blessingsmagazine.ca



*“For it is in giving
that we receive.”*

— St. Francis of Assisi

I would like to share a story about how God's goodness could never be outdone.

My name is Rosalia and I am a Secular Franciscan or OFS at St. Peter's Parish in Woodbridge. Twice a year the OFS organizes a meal at St. Patrick's Catholic Church for Toronto's 250-300 homeless. This is part of the "Out of the Cold Program". The homeless of Toronto are fed, clothed and given a place to sleep by St. Patrick's from October to April, on Sundays.

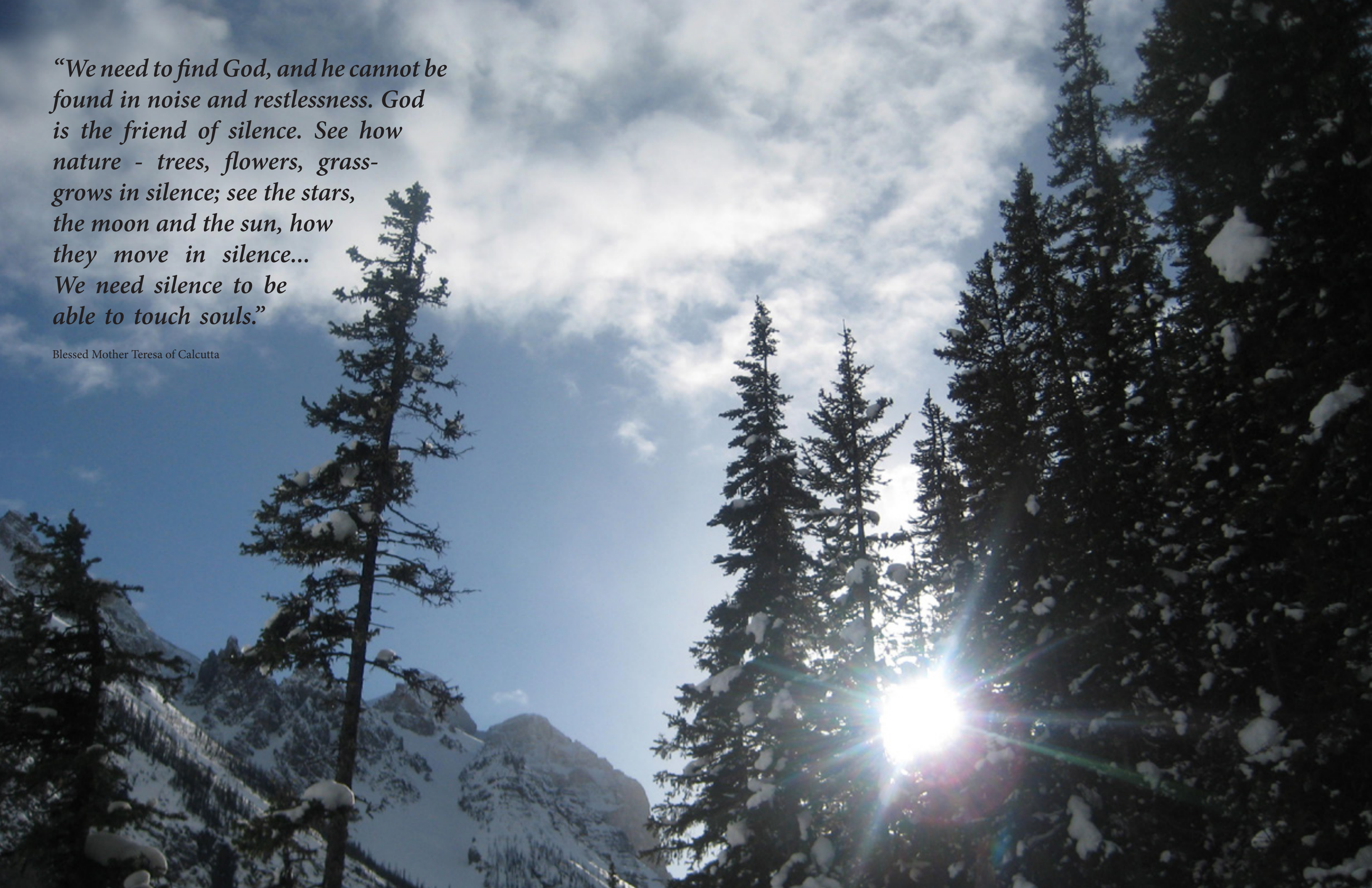
Last year on December 19th the OFS and St. Peter's prepared 250 gift bags filled with things that the homeless may need to help them keep warm during the winter months. Gift certificates for food were given out to each one of the guests at the end of their meal. Our beautiful children's choir at St. Peter's always prepares a small bag of sweets with a personalized Christmas card for each gift bag.

*I had to walk past him so I smiled
– he smiled back as he had just
opened his Christmas gift bag.
“Excuse me” he said.*

At the end of the dinner, as the gift bags were handed out along with a smile and greeting for a blessed Christmas from the volunteers, I noticed a man sitting in a wheelchair. I had to walk past him so I smiled – he smiled back as he had just opened his Christmas gift bag. "Excuse me" he said. I thought he may have needed some help with something so I got closer. Perplexed, he continued, "May I ask you a question?" Quite puzzled I stood next to him and said, "Of course, how can I help you?" "Who is Betty?" he said in a soft voice. "Pardon me?," I answered. I was not sure what he was talking about. "Who is Betty, do you know?" He repeated. I moved in closer and noticed on his lap he had the contents of the candy bag spilled out and was reading the handmade Christmas card. He showed it to me and I read it out loud.

"Merry Christmas and May God bless you...love always, Betty". These words were handwritten with a picture of the cartoon character of Betty Boop. There was a bubble over her head as if she was giving the greeting. The man in the wheelchair then showed me the sleeve of his winter jacket where he had sewn a circular patch of Betty Boop. "Can I tell you something?" he said as his blue eyes welled up with tears. "My wife passed away almost a year ago and her name was Elizabeth, I was the only one who ever called her Betty". He wept.

I put my hand on his shoulder and looked him in the eyes. "She loves you so much more today than she could ever tell you. God is so good sir", I whispered. "Amen" he responded. "Have a blessed Christmas sir" and we exchanged a hug.

A low-angle photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, several evergreen trees are covered in snow, their dark green needles contrasting with the white. The sun is shining brightly from behind the trees on the right, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene. The background shows snow-covered mountain peaks under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

“We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.”

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Coincidence?

Written by Joan Simone

I have learned in my life that God works in ways that seem mysterious, at the time, but in retrospect you can see a beautiful plan He is offering to us. I was born in England at the beginning of WWII. After the war was over, my father brought my mother and I to Canada so that I could have a more secure life. He applied to three countries. Canada was the only one that would accept us. Coincidence? I don't think so.

I was raised in a Catholic family, Sunday Mass, even on vacation, grace before meals, no meat on Friday and Love. My father showed unconditional love in the way he looked after my mother. She had a lot of anxieties. In my early teens, at a Catholic Youth Organization, I met my future husband. We both wanted to have a big family. Coincidence? I don't think so. We have now been married for 52 years and have 13 children and 30 grandchildren. We married while Andrew was still in university and had two children before graduation. He continued with post grad years and we

continued with children. Times were hard and we had little money, but never missed a meal. God looked after us. Coincidence? No. He had a plan.

“I had the family I wanted, but there was something missing.”

My spiritual life was totally on hold. With the big family there was no time to sit and say the rosary, or go for a walk and look at God's goodness. Yes, I went to Mass each week, but taking 3 or 4 little ones with me was not spiritual. Hearing the scriptures was not to be. I felt more upset and frustrated after Mass than I had going in. The only solution was to stop going to Mass, it was too much. I wanted the big family. God gave me the big family, we were looking after them, what more could He want? The solution was I would stay at home and look after them, no more dragging them to Mass. My soul-mate said, “NO”. We started splitting

up and taking only the older children. This worked better but it was still hard. I had yet to learn to ask Him for help.

When all formal education was finished and things were better financially-we had a house big enough for the family, food in the fridge and the chance of a comfortable future. Something was wrong. I was not happy. The children, now into the teen years, were starting to get into trouble. Things were OK. I had the family I wanted, but there was something missing. Through a cousin, I was asked to go to a prayer meeting, he said it was special. Under great resistance, I went, just this once. There was something special. I continued going. There was something super special. After a month, Andrew came with me. He too found that there was something special. We were prayed over during The Life and Spirit Program and found what was special. God was someone who Loved us, just as we are-not just a God that we had to obey because He said so, but a God that we wanted to Love and Serve. We both felt called to live

a simpler life and work with the Poor. That took more active prayer. We gave away what was not needed for our family. We kept the house and little money. For support we became Secular Franciscans. Through prayer and service and time I found peace and a sense of power that all would be better when I put my trust in this new found God of Love, Jesus.

I became less demanding and picked my battles with the children and my husband. We took time to sit and talk, go for walks, let them play in the rain or mud. Memories were made, maybe not the beds. Memories are forever. The children did not rebel too much and learned that if they wanted anything other than the necessities we provided they had to work for it. They went through all the growing pains of becoming adults and now are all responsible adults, some with families of their own. Many have said that because of the simple ways they were raised they can see how easy it can be to fall into a selfish

life and not appreciate who and what they have. Love and Peace spreads.

There have been times that I thought

“It is not a bargain I make with Him; it is a faith that He loves me more than I can love Him.”

things were hard or impossible to cope with but having Jesus close at hand I could give the situation right back to Him and say “Please help me”. He has always come through. There are times He says “NO”, but I can accept it and move on. It is not a bargain I make with Him; it is a faith that He loves me more than I can love Him.

I have many rolls in my life, a woman, a wife, a Dr.'s wife, a mother, a charity

In 1992, Blessed Mother Teresa in one of many letters to the Simones commented to Andrew on “Joan's love for the little ones whom she continues to receive into your home...” she then says, “a child is such a living presence of God”. Joan Simone has an intimate knowledge of this love - which at times many of us forget. When asked to write about herself she describes her faith and family - not the two charities Canadian Food for Children and Silent Children's Mission - that she founded with her husband. <http://www.canadianfoodforchildren.net>





The Immaculate Conception

Living in an age when online information is always available, everywhere we turn, it is hard to imagine ever traveling to a new destination without doing a great deal of preparation in advance. Accommodations, travel provisions, and schedules are often arranged and rearranged many times before we even start on our journey. That being said, it only makes sense that when planning His greatest adventure, that of becoming human and saving mankind from sin, God made certain before arriving on Earth he had arranged to have the best possible place to stay.

In joining the human race, God chose to be born of the flesh in the human way, through a woman. In choosing which woman He would grant the grace to bear and deliver Him as the Word Incarnate, the main criteria was simple: she had to be free from all sin. God, who is pure goodness and complete perfection, could not exist within anything less than that same Holy consistency - as Jesus claims in Matthew 9:17, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins". Pure goodness was to be contained within a being who herself lived a life of pure goodness, meaning that this woman was to be conceived in pure goodness, without the stain of original sin, the sinful marks of our ancestors. As perplexing as the concept of original sin may seem, as we grow as adults we can all recognize that the bad habits and sinful tendencies that surround our childhood and adolescence, become those which we are at risk of adopting and imparting onto those around us. This Sinful inheritance is omitted from Mary, the chosen woman, and when **she** is conceived with a clean slate and a pure soul we as Catholics witness what the Church has declared as the Immaculate Conception.

The Idea of Mary, the mother of God, being conceived without original sin is one that historically has been held as advanced dogma, restricted to only the most elite theologians, due to the misunderstanding it could evoke. The Catholic Church is often criticized as fostering a Godlike worship of Mary, and a teaching like the Immaculate Conception can easily fuel the fire. Firstly, the Immaculate Conception is an act of God and not of the Virgin Mary, and like all aspects of God stands as a mystery beyond full human comprehension. Further we must always remember that Mary is born without original sin, yet not without free will. Mary has an opportunity to live without sin and in complete obedience to God, but this does not mean that she is forced to do so. It is only after a young life made up of sacrifice and a strong and perseverant will to be faithful to God in the truest sense that the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary with news of God's plan. Mary's choice to sin would have counted her out as a candidate to be the mother of God, though she had every right to sin and repent of her sin, for God would not have been able to develop and dwell within the womb of a sinner. Any questions of Mary's Godlike status and lack of free will are dispelled when, after showing herself worthy through a life of obedience, God does not tell her she has been chosen, but asks her, leaving her the option of saying no, and proving that Mary's involvement in the life of Jesus is based on her choices and desire to be Holy.

Ryan Attard is a Religious Educator in York Region. For more of his thoughts on the Catholic Church and Her teachings tune into the Spiritual Stretch, Saturdays at 10am on Radio Teopoli AM 530.

Did You Know?

⁴⁹⁰ To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role."¹³² The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace".¹³³ In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace. CCC.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church

Joy

Joy! Have you ever seen that word on signs and decorations at Christmas time? What's it all about? Are we supposed to be happy because there's snow on the ground and presents under the tree? Certainly those are things that put a smile on our face, but joy is something greater than a fleeting moment of gladness. Joy is something that abides in our hearts even in times of sadness and pain, and that kind of joy is something only Christ can bring. Here we are getting ready for Christmas, the birth of the Redeemer, and we have to ask ourselves: why did the Son of God come down from heaven to dwell among us? To save us from our sins? Yes, of course. To show us the Father's love? Yes, that too. I would propose, however, that the Saviour Jesus Christ came to Earth to bring us joy. Absolutely! And why should He want to bring us joy? Because He looked down from heaven and saw that the wonderful world that God created had become a "valley of tears".

We often talk about the mystery of the Incarnation, and it is a mystery. After all, who in their right mind would give up glory and honour and power in exchange for poverty and helplessness? The Son of God did precisely this unthinkable act of emptying Himself in order to become one of us. And He came to Earth not as a full grown man capable of commanding a host of servants, but as an infant, a baby totally dependent on the nurturing of His mother Mary who carried the "Word made flesh" in her own womb for nine months and on St. Joseph, his foster father who would love him as his own son. This little child was born not in a hospital or in the comfort of his parents' home, but in a stable where animals eat and sleep. He was dressed not in purple and fine linens, but was wrapped in swaddling clothes. His bed was not the latest model crib, but a manger. And he would grow up without the creaturely comforts of the upper class, but working with his hands and, like most of humanity, struggling to survive. His purpose in life was to dwell among us as one who serves. If that isn't love then I don't know what is.

Is it any wonder that when Christ was born he brought joy and peace to troubled hearts. Mary and Joseph did not have an easy life, but holding the babe in their arms they were able to see a greater reality, reminding them that love is greater than any sorrow or sadness. And the shepherds, those poor, illiterate men who had to sleep out in the fields watching over their flocks; they also

were able to look upon the infant Jesus and realize that they had received the gift of the Father's unconditional love. The wise men too, who came bearing precious gifts, discovered that God had given them a treasure far greater than anything they had brought in homage of the newborn king. The Saviour's birth wiped away the tears of those who were able to recognize that God was in their midst.

"The wonderful world that God created had become a 'valley of tears.' "

As the child grew up, He would bring joy to so many more men and women who were weary and carried heavy burdens: the woman caught in adultery who experienced the gift of forgiveness which was greater than the anger and judgement of the crowd; the fishermen of Galilee who would fill their nets with souls instead of sole; the leper who would no longer experience the exclusion brought about by his condition, but be reunited with his community; the woman who would draw water at the well at midday in order to avoid her neighbours and had her shame removed by the unconditional love of the Messiah; the sisters of Lazarus who witnessed with their own eyes that the power of life is greater than the power of death. None of these people would suddenly have a trouble-free existence after their encounter with Christ, but they would carry a joy in their heart that no one could ever take away. Yes, the joy of Christ's birth, of God made man, and later the joy of the resurrection.

As Christian people, as individuals who have a personal relationship with Christ and who are called to be in communion with Him and with each other, we have all been given the gift of joy that comes from our faith in Jesus and our belief in God's everlasting love for us. Whatever life brings, and it will bring its share of heartache and pain, depression, anxiety, physical illness, broken relationships, the death of those we love; no matter what we have to face or endure on this earth, we do so with the knowledge that God is with us, Emmanuel. May our eyes always be open to see His presence among us as did Mary and Joseph, as did the shepherds and the Magi.

There are few things we can control in our human existence. One of them is to choose whether we will be negative people who focus on what we don't have and on what's wrong with our life, or positive people who are grateful for the many blessings we have received from the God who loves us so much. He gave us His only Son who came to Earth to live and suffer and die and rise again for us and for our salvation. If we focus on this great truth, that we are loved always and everywhere by our God, that we have been given God's infinite mercy and life-giving Spirit, that we have been called out of darkness into God's wonderful light, then even with tears in our eyes and bruises on our bodies, we will still experience this joy that comes from heaven.

Over two thousand years ago the Son of God came down to Earth to bring us joy. Every time we see a baby most of us allow that little creature to put a smile on our face. Jesus Christ is more than just another cute baby who makes us smile; He is the one who truly heals our hearts and our souls. So then, let's not wallow in self pity or in negativity, but allow ourselves to experience some of that joy that the Christ child brings. And, as I like to remind people, if we hope to inherit eternal joy in heaven one day, then let's start practicing some of that joy down here, the joy that only Christ can bring.

Rev. Ernesto De Ciccio, is
Pastor of St. David's Parish in
Maple, Ontario.
He is originally from Montreal
and was ordained in 1988 at
the age of 28.



"Love is greater than any sorrow or sadness."





“Then an angel of the Lord...

*stood before them, and the glory of the Lord
shone around them, and they were terrified.
But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be
afraid; for see—I am bringing you good
news of great joy for all the people: to
you is born this day in the city
of David a Saviour, who is
the Messiah, the Lord.’”*

Luke 2:9-11

Lost and Found

The idea and concept of Father in our Catholic faith is the basis of our religion. But getting to the Father is the mystery of our faith. Luckily, the Father sent a Son, and the Son said, “No one comes to the Father, except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.” That passage is from John 14:6-7, and has never meant more to me than it has in the past few years.

Growing up, I had what most would consider a very normal life. At a young age, I felt as if my family was the perfect TV family. There were four of us: my parents, my sister, and myself. Little did I know that God had a plan for our family that no one would have believed or seen coming. In April of 1997, I was walking home from school when my neighbour invited me into their house to wait for my parents to return home. My next memory is of being in a hospital room and seeing my sister full of tubes, my parents crying, and a priest standing over her. I didn’t know for sure what was happening, but I understood I would never see my sister again.

One month later, my parents would settle their divorce and my dad would move out. So, at the age of 7, I watched my sister pass away and my dad leave my family. But a day doesn’t go by where I don’t thank God for giving me the mom he did. Without her my life would be lost and I would be on a path far off the one I am on now. And for the mothers reading this magazine: you will always argue with your sons (as my mom and I do), but that love that bonds you can never break if you always try to mend it with God. Growing up I was always upset at my mom for taking me away from my dad, but I still had the opportunity of seeing him on weekends and Wednesdays.

As I grew up, my faith in God grew stronger, as did my love for Church. When we moved to Maple, I was happy to live next to Wonderland, but other than that I wanted to move back to the home where I grew up. Then, in Grade 7, I was finally old enough to go to the Oasis youth group and St. David’s parish, where I was nourished in my faith by the group. One of the opportunities a kid gets at Oasis is the chance to go to Steubenville, Ohio. In Steubenville there is a Franciscan University that holds a weekend youth conference. It was in Steubenville that it was revealed to me our faith is much more than going to mass and confession. We had the opportunity of meeting Christ in Adoration. The charisms of our faith are tremendous but rarely spoken of. For me, adoration was a place to find healing inside for my brokenness; but with healing came many, many tears. I was very thankful to be able to go with Oasis to Ohio my first year with the group. The following year I would go again with the group, but that isn’t what I remember from that summer.

My dad was an alcoholic and drug abuser, but my love for him made me blind to these issues. We went on our yearly camping trip and one night, driving back from fishing, my dad drank far too much. We started arguing about his drinking and he began to speed; he took a turn too fast and we smashed into a tree. Neither of us were wearing our seat belts but, by God’s grace, we weren’t ejected from the car. After waking my dad from unconsciousness, I realized that my collar-bone was broken and that we would have to walk three kilometres to get to a phone. But, even after that accident, the first thing I told my dad was that I loved him no matter what. After that day, however, I didn’t see or talk to my father

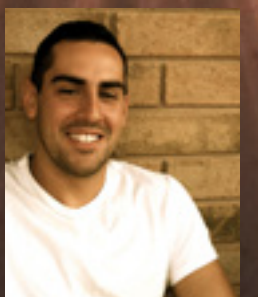
for a year. Naturally, our relationship grew further and further apart. Up until I was 16 or 17, my dad and I had some contact, but after that he stopped trying. I would call and call, and wait for my birthday or for Christmas, but I never received a call or a card. He never returned my calls or messages; he had totally abandoned me.

By this point, during every adoration and every Steubenville visit, I wondered why he had abandoned me, and shortly after tears would stream down my face. It wasn’t until I was 19, during adoration in Steubenville, that I looked up one moment and looked at the cross; more specifically, at the Corpus. And in looking at that I realized that my Father never left. I looked upon that cross and understood that a father’s arms are always open, as Christ’s are; that he would bear large amounts of pain, as Christ did; and that a loving father would accept death to save his child, as Christ did. In that moment at adoration I realized that my true Father, and all of our Fathers, is Christ, who will always call, always send cards, and never abandon us.

I grew up with a painful childhood, pain that I tried to bury with drugs and alcohol, but pain that hurt so badly that nothing superficial, no quick fix, could ever cure. But I finally came to understand that Christ in prayer, in scripture, in mass, in confession and, most of all, in the most Holy Eucharist, can heal all wounds. At 22 years old I can finally say that my Father truly loves me and would never leave me. God Bless.

“We started arguing about his drinking and he began to speed; he took a turn too fast and we smashed into a tree.”

Christopher DeIuliis Motta is a 22 year old Youth Minister at St. David’s Parish in Maple, Ontario



ETHIOPIA:



Despite the hardships these people may endure they never falter in their ability to experience joy, emanating kindness and genuine gratitude for what they have. The Catholic community I lived within commit deeply to their beliefs and live with conviction of faith - a true testament to the belief in God's omnipresence in their lives and hearts. This is exemplified by the mercy and grace with which they exist, they serve as an example to me.

**They reminded me
of how simple it all
really is, reduced to
its very essence. Love.**

From the moment I met the boys of the orphanage who live in Shashamane, Ethiopia, I was welcomed as one of their own. Without hesitation or trepidation of any kind, these young boys ranging from ages 7-18 opened their minds and hearts to myself and the other Canadian missionaries. I was amazed by their ability to overcome our cultural differences immediately and focus on the things we had in common. I will never forget one boy who said to me "Celia, I cannot speak many word of English, but I know what we share...Christ." I was deeply touched by the clarity with which he had assessed the situation, and how true his words were. By the time my mission trip had come to an end it felt as though I was leaving my home. It only took a month for me to build bonds and connections with the people and culture there. To forge relationships that have changed my heart forever.



The spirit of Ethiopia is impossible to describe without using the word love many times over. The love is palpable. It is a place where life is simplified by lack of materialism, which carries with it the burden of devastating poverty and disease. This unfortunate reality allows the Ethiopian people an acute sense of what is fundamentally important. Their consciousness is not clouded by superficiality; therefore, they remain open to happiness, love and joy in the truest sense of the words. Happiness derived from appreciation of the perfection in a particularly beautiful sunrise or a family shared coffee ceremony. They have unrelenting faith and trust in God, and it keeps their vision clear.

The obvious dichotomies between the place I call home and this country in Africa are abundant; culture, society, education, food, climate etc. Beyond the empirical though, there are those intangible, often ineffable 'things' that are experienced. The products of these experiences become the pieces that make up the framework of who we are as individuals. This process and its basic components, are what make us all human. I have learned that the environment in which this occurs has very little to do with this structure at the basic level.

My missionary work in Ethiopia has made a very strong impression on my heart. In the beginning I imposed unrealistic expectations upon myself as well as the work I would perform. Now, I appreciate it the way God must have intended - that's the thing about faith, isn't it? I was blessed to be able to share in the lives of the people of Ethiopia, from which I have learned that paramount to all things life is beautiful around the world and it is Christ who brings us to that joy. Faith expressed through love happens everywhere on the planet, even in the places you might least expect it.

Teach us to Love

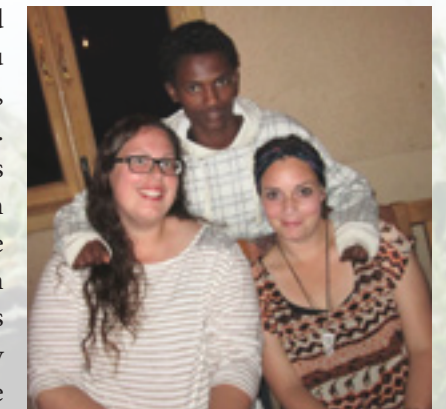
As a volunteer for the Consolata Missionaries I was assigned to teach English in the local Catholic school, paint the schoolhouse, and play with the children. I felt I had far more to contribute than to complete this simple task list. I knew that I had the ability to make a difference in these children's lives. My duty to educate them extended beyond the English language, I could impact their spirituality and faith.

After about a day or two spent with the children I realized that I was sorely mistaken. It wasn't that they were not open to the possibility - it's just that I was wrong. They are not in need of any life lessons I would be imparting. I assumed I would have something to teach them about how to be a good Christian, that I would help them navigate all the complexities of what that meant, and that after our time together they would be enlightened. As it turned out, they would be the ones to bestow light on me. They reminded me of how simple it all really is, reduced to its very essence. Love.

**“God loves the
cheerful giver.”**

How in this century is it possible some people are born into such misfortune in places in the world that still struggle for basic necessities? Why would God allow these children to suffer? Having experienced such a place first hand, I no longer ask this question of Him. I have come to realize that spiritually we are the ones who are starving. God has bestowed on them something far more valuable. The ability to live with clarity, simply, in reverence, and in pure faith. Of course food and water are the necessities of our physiology, but our souls and our hearts require nourishment as well, and nothing anyone can buy could ever satisfy those needs. Western culture has us convinced that we need so much more than we actually do to survive - and that those things are outside of ourselves. We are constantly trying to satiate our spiritual appetite with physical things - the whole time never even realizing which part of us is hungry. The Ethiopian people I met made me acutely aware of this fact and showed me every day that this knowledge was something of which they had an abundance. I asked Haptamu, a young boy of 18 with whom I had developed a friendship, what it was like to be on the receiving

end of charity and missionary work, to which he replied; "Listen sister, God came to the world to help us out in what we really are- to teach us how to live and love. Look, is it not the same thing that you are doing now? God came to teach us how to live in His way, in the way which is so better than any thing else...God loves the cheerful giver." I understand that Haptamu was referring to me as the 'giver' in his response, but I know in my heart God was speaking through him that day, confirming that I had been the one in need of charity. Haptamu and his people, in love, had given it to me. This "poor" kid has rejuvenated my faith in an insurmountable way. It is this lesson I hope these words impress upon you my reader. God will place who he wants you to influence in your path and who you need to learn from in yours. He wants us to be the best version of ourselves. In this way, all people we meet must be treated with the love He shows us. Our faith is meaningless if it is not encompassed and directed by love. No matter where you are, put your faith into action. Live by this truth-"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Galatians 5:6



Celia Ieradi is a teacher for the TCDSB, a missionary, a Youth Minister and a Catechist.

<http://www.consolata.ca/index.html>



easy homemade CHRISTMAS TAGS

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

pencils, pens, printer paper, festive scrapbook paper, scissors, glue, ruler, hole puncher, ribbon.

OPTIONAL: festive stickers, stencils, previously used tags, photos, computer.

1



STEP ONE

BASE: Using scrapbook paper cut out a square, or use a stencil (previously used tag) to trace as the base of your tag.

2



STEP TWO

MESSAGE: Create a festive message for the recipient by hand, or on the computer. Cut it out slightly smaller than the size of your tag in order to create a border. Glue the message to the tag.

3



STEP THREE

RIBBON HOLE: Hole punch the top left corner of your tag. Measure a piece of ribbon approximately 15 cm long. Thread that ribbon through the hole in your tag.

4



STEP FOUR

FINISHING TOUCHES: Use festive stickers, glitter, sprinkles to add a bit of glam to your gift tag.

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

“Now once he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” (Luke 11:1) Richard Rohr had the following to say about the Church’s call to teach prayer: “When the Church is no longer teaching the people how to pray, we could almost say it will have lost its reason for existence. Prayer is the ultimate empowerment of the people of God. Overemphasis on social prayer has left many of our people passive, without a personal prayer life and comfortable with ‘handed-down religion’ instead of first-hand experience.” That is what we are longing for: First-hand experience of God.



Recently I came out of a bakery with a free sample of cake in my hand. My wife saw me eating it and asked what it tasted like. I could have started to describe it: “It has a hint of cinnamon with some nutmeg...” I did not even try. I simply gave her a piece. Try it and see how it tastes. We could say the same of God: “Taste and see that the Lord is Good.” (Ps. 34:8) That is why I encourage you to learn ways of prayer – so you can taste and see the goodness of God.

That is what I hope for more than anything else for my children and for the students I serve: that they come to know first-hand the goodness of God. It’s one thing for religion to give us moral guidance and rules, but quite another to experience inner transformation. Once you experience God within yourself and within others, respect and care for one another follows very naturally. It’s no longer a matter of rules. St. Augustine said, “Love God and do as you will.” If we know and love God we will want to pray and we will want to serve. Rules are important, but our virtue has to go “deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees.” (Matthew 5:20)



I came to experience God because of the grace of God and the witness and words of genuine ministers of the Gospel. This experience of God who is unconditional love changed everything and from that time I began to commit myself to prayer, to learning about God and sharing what I had learned. But God cannot be explained or taught God has to be experienced. Prayer can be taught, but, it is only by the practice of prayer that we can come to experience God. Prayer is very personal, so it’s up to you.

Tony has taught and led retreats in parishes and schools since 1983. He earned his M.R.E. from St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto. Tony is married with two daughters and lives in Richmond Hill, Ontario. He can be reached at tonywhelan4@gmail.com.

“Lord, Teach Us To Pray” is available at www.createpace.com/3827249

A Legacy of God's Grace

Sometime in 1952 as a baby I was dropped from a cart pulled by a cow and buried in the mud. My mother consecrated my life to God and prayed for my survival and out of that mud God's Grace began to work in me.

At the age of 11, I entered minor seminary and for 4 years God moulded me for His purposes.

At the age of 20, I married Cecilia and on March 31, 1975 God entrusted us with a beautiful little baby girl with lots of black hair. She was the second of our 5 children. Her beginning was so fragile that she was baptised in the hospital: Melanie was here.

Melanie grew up healthy, happy, beautiful and with a big heart. In her earlier years many times we would find her playing and giggling in her room as if she had a friend over. When asked, she would often say she was playing with the Child Jesus.

Early in 1991, at the age of 16, our daughter Melanie ran away from home the first time. It was about 1 hour before we were going to be interviewed to determine if we would be accepted into the diaconate formation. After this, Melanie came back home but later left again. She abandoned school and lived on the streets until December, 2006. Melanie would only contact us or come home when she was sick, but once better, she would go right back to the streets.

We tried every resource we could find but nothing worked. All we could do for her was to love her anyway. Our door and our hearts were always open and our rosaries bathed with tears.

In January, 1994 I lost my job and in March I started my own construction company.

Early in 1996, a couple of months before my ordination, we got a phone call: Melanie was in the hospital with a very serious and mysterious condition that almost took her life. For 3 weeks we left everything to be at her side. By God's grace, the last minute intervention of a friend led to the right diagnosis and the subsequent surgery that saved her life at that time. Melanie had "Budd-Chiari" and her liver was almost totally destroyed.

On June 22, 1996, by the grace of God, I was ordained a Permanent Deacon.

Melanie continued in her struggles and we in ours. In December, 2000, we got a phone call: Melanie was in prison...

We visited her, bathed in tears and managed to bail her out. Our business was failing and we had no money so we posted our home as security. On New Year's Eve, Melanie went out. We did not know where. We were afraid for Melanie's safety and as Bail conditions were breached, we could lose our Security. So after 3 days, I did the most difficult thing I've ever had to do: I revoked the bail and withdrew my responsibility for Melanie.

The next day, she was found and taken into custody again.

A few days into January, 2001, alone at a Mississauga job site early in the morning, in the freezing rain and cold, I cried: "Why God?"- We serve the Church; we work so hard, we try our best and ... look at us: we are financially ruined, and Melanie is in Jail! Why us Lord?"

With tears streaming down my face and the shovel in my hands, I cried out: "Jesus, where are you?"

I thrust the shovel into the ground and suddenly - right there in the mud - I saw 2 twigs grafted together: a cross ... the cross in the mud! Then, in my heart, His gentle voice spoke: "I am right here in the mud with you". I picked up the cross and hugged it tightly. I looked at the cross, inspecting it. For the twigs to be grafted, they were both wounded, but nothing could break them apart. Again in my heart, His gentle voice whispered "in your wounds stay grafted to My wounds, and you will never be alone again".

From that moment on, I knew like never before, that I was never alone in the mud of my life. I understood that, grafted to Jesus in our wounds, we shared in His Life and nothing would ever be stronger than the Power of his Love to get us through and out of any mud.

As we journeyed with Melanie through a new bail hearing and many court appearances, the charges were dropped and Melanie was free. God was also providing for our temporal needs. We were almost out of the mud.

All we needed was for Melanie to leave the life of the streets and come home. After many more tears and prayers, the same silent, gentle voice in the heart, promised Cecilia: "Not the way you expect, but Melanie is coming home". And so it was: on December 2nd, 2006, we received another phone call. Melanie was in the hospital, fighting for her life. A drunk

driver put her there. Melanie survived, but her life could never be the same. In March, 2007, she came home and we cared for her. Months later Melanie called me to her side and asked:

"Dad... What will be my legacy when I am gone from this world?"

At the age of 16 I left home and lived on the streets with strangers.

I tried so many things but never accomplished any,
made so many friends but never held one too long,
played so many tunes but never heard the music,
made so many laugh but never found my joy,
gave my love to all but never found my love.

Wrote so many poems but threw the papers away,
prayed so many prayers but kept looking for trouble,
dared to dream so high but never got off the ground,

trusted in God wholeheartedly but turned my back on Him.

I hoped for much but settled for nothing,
I had faith in Jesus but did not believe in myself,
fought so hard for my health but kept poisoning myself with drugs,

tried to be independent but enslaved myself to addictions,
loved to play with children but can't ever have my own.

I was proud of my family but left them for my strangers,
Those who hurt me the most I made my closest company,
but those who loved me the most, my family, I also hurt the most...

So, Dad...What will be my legacy?

What do I have to show for myself?

What mark will I leave?

What will be my contribution to humanity?

When I am gone...,
what will they say of me?"

It was then that I shared the story of the "Cross in the Mud" with Melanie.

She smiled and said: "That's it, dad. That is my legacy. It's not what I have done, but what God has done for me. Share this story with others so that they might also find the Mercy of God in their suffering just as I did in mine.

And so, here I am sharing this story with you as I have shared with thousands of others and watched the Mercy of God touch their lives. There are new stories being written, like the man who claimed to be an atheist but when he heard this story and saw the "Cross in the mud", he cried profusely and accepted God's Love for him. There are also many people with addictions, who have found hope and encouragement to heal their disease. There was a Palestinian man who held the "Cross in the mud" in his hands and asked our Jesus to heal his wife of cancer. Thus, the legacy of God's mercy continues to be written in many ways and to touch so many lives through a simple "Cross in the mud".

After the accident, Melanie lived with us and her life changed. She continued to struggle with addictions, mostly because of the high doses of prescribed pain medication (she was in constant pain and almost every week, I had to run with her to the hospital). Melanie reconciled with everyone individually, asking for forgiveness from everyone she had hurt and she was at peace.

On December 21, 2009, the whole family went for confession together; Melanie was so full of Peace and Joy and exclaimed: "this is going to be my best Christmas ever. I wrapped all my gifts, I made peace with everyone, I went to confession, now I am ready for Christmas". That night Melanie went again to the hospital with internal bleeding. In the hospital, afflicted with atrocious pain, Melanie said: "Dad I can not remember a day without pain any more. This pain is so bad that I can't bear it. If God wants, He can take me now. I am ready. God heard her. On December 24, 2009, Melanie went to the birthday party of her childhood friend: the Child Jesus. Melanie passed on to the new life. That was her best Christmas ever.

Deacon Carlos Nogueira was ordained a permanent deacon in 1996. He is the Archbishop's Liaison to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the Archdiocese of Toronto since 2001.

"I am right here in the mud with you."

Actual Cross



Are prayers heard?

St. Monica is revered by mothers who pray for their rebellious children. A great example of persistence and patience in prayer is the relationship between St. Monica and her son St. Augustine. In his confessions St. Augustine writes about his sins of lust, pride and arrogance. He talks about being disobedient with a rebellious nature and following social pressure of his peers. He told his mother St. Monica that there would be no problem between them if only she would give up her faith. Instead Monica prayed and fasted for the conversion of her son Augustine for over 9 years. St. Augustine is now referred to as Doctor of the Church.



Fr. Peter Clement ofm

Women of the Word Toronto

We are delighted to host our 4th Annual Forum

Women and Choices



Sunday May 5th, 2013

10:00 am to 2:30 pm

at

Premiere Banquet Hall

696 Westburne Drive

Concord, Ontario

(Jane and Rutherford)

\$55.00 per person

Come join us.

A day where women of all ages and walks of life, can come together and fortify our spiritual strength.

Come nurture your soul, mind, and body.

Come be inspired, be strengthened, be enlightened.


Keynote speaker: Dr. Josephine Lombardi

St. Augustine's Seminary

For more information please email us at: womenofthewordtoronto@gmail.com

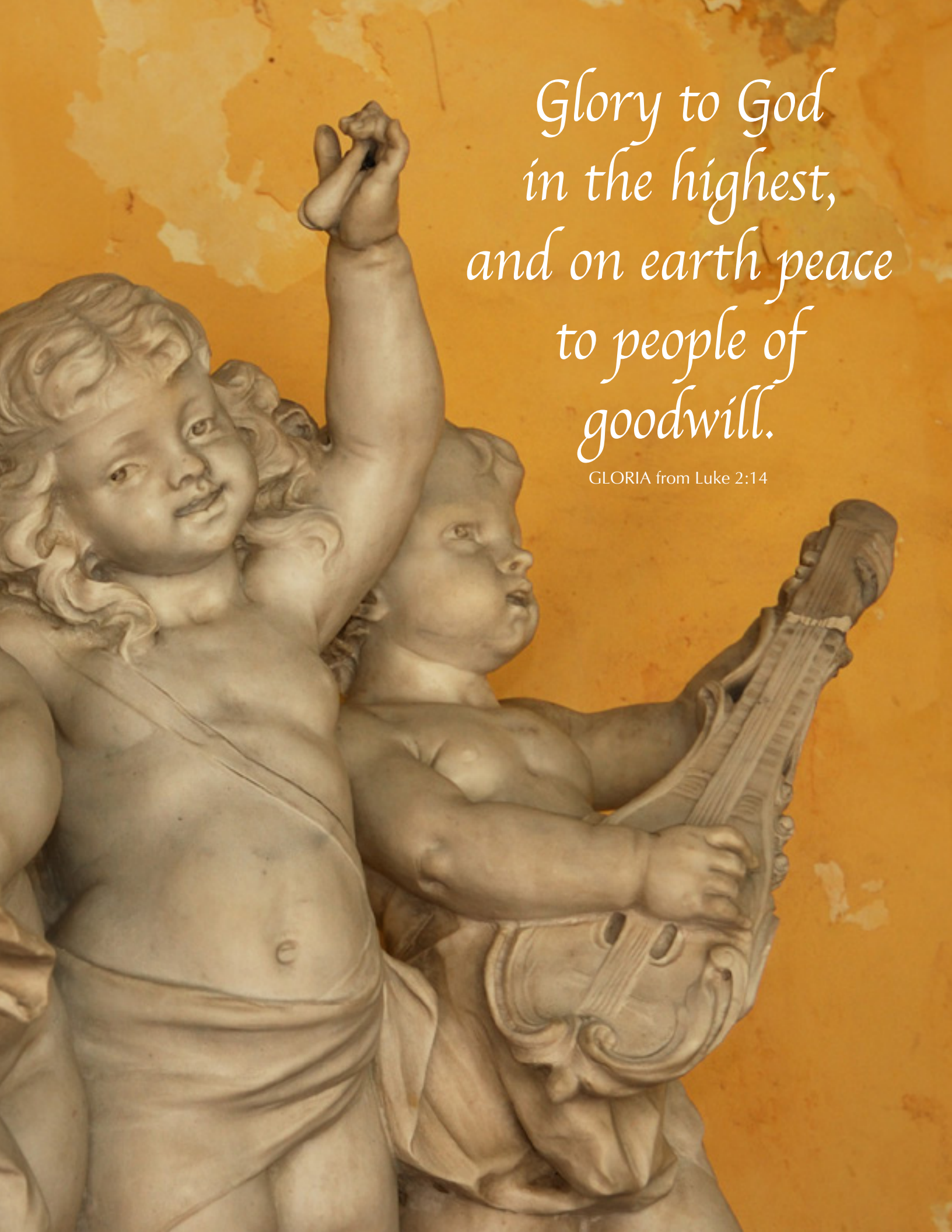
Sponsored by WOWT (Women of the Word Toronto).

We are today's Catholic women; witnesses and professors of faith, dedicated to inspiring devotion, strength, and purpose as true daughters of God.

A small, fluffy bird with yellow and brown plumage is perched on a thin, snow-covered branch. The bird is facing right, and its feathers appear soft and downy. The background is a blurred, snowy landscape with some evergreen branches visible. In the top left corner, there are a few red berries. The overall scene is peaceful and wintry.

*“An attitude of gratitude
involves being surprised by
small blessings.”*

Deacon Dominic Pullano



*Glory to God
in the highest,
and on earth peace
to people of
goodwill.*

GLORIA from Luke 2:14