God’s greatness in little things

VATICAN City (CNS) – God shows his greatness through his tenderness toward his children like a loving father, Pope Francis said.

In his homily during morning Mass at Domus Sanctae Marthae Dec. 14, the pope said it is as if God “wants to sing us a lullaby” to soothe those who are wounded.

“He carries us within his very being. He is the God who with this dialogue makes himself little to make us understand, so that we may trust in him and we can tell him with the courage of Paul.”

Pope Francis reflected on the day’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah a which proclaims that “the Lord is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.”

This compassion is most evident during the Christmas season, where God “makes himself small and in his smallness, does not stop being great,” Pope Francis told the congregation.

Bishop’s message for Christmas

“As we celebrate the birth of our Savior and greet a New Year, let us unwrap the gift of salvation offered by making Mary’s words our own: ‘Let it be done to me according to thy word.’

“May the Christ Child bring you and your loved ones the Gift of Love, the Blessing of Hope and the Promise of Peace. A blessed Christmas and joy-filled New Year!”

Around the Diocese

Mr. Poissant

Msgr. Leeward Poissant, one of 48 retired priests to benefit from the 2017 Christmas collection, looks back on his life as a priest

FULL STORY, PAGE 3

CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS

Mary and the Christ Child are depicted in a 1997 painting by Elizabeth Wang. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated Dec. 25.
An early taste of Christmas joy

Christmas came a little early for the Diocese of Ogdensburg as we were blessed by the presence of Bishop Antoine Chebie of our twin diocese of Latakia, Syria.

This charming, gentle prelate certainly made friends across the diocese as he met Catholic school kids, priests, deacons and many folks of the North Country Church.

As a guest at the Christmas party for diocesan employees, Bishop Chebie had a chance to reflect a bit on his visit. He told us that he particularly enjoyed meeting the priests and deacons who gathered in Watertown, Ogdensburg and Plattsburgh. “When I see the way the priests are serving the people and their parishes and the love the faithful have for their priests, I found it very beautiful,” he said.

The bishop also encouraged his new American friends to appreciate the gifts and graces of our lives.

“When I saw that you had power every day, I found it a little bit weird,” he said. “And the respect that people have for the law, I found that a little bit weird.”

What a lesson for those of us who find any inconvenience or minimal threat to our safety or comfort, just too weird to tolerate.

This week’s coverage of Bishop Chebie’s visit is just the beginning of our long term commitment to keep the story of Syrian Christians in front of the eyes of Christians of the North Country.

In coming weeks we will publish background material about Christianity in Syria which Bishop Chebie supplied to Father Steve Murray, chair of the Solidarity in Faith committee. We will also, of course, keep up with all the diocesan initiatives to reach out to Bishop Chebie’s diocese.

In Plattsburgh, Bishop LaValley said, “This isn’t a one-time thing. This is a relationship that continues to blossom, that continues to move forward.”

The relationship will continue with monetary donations that we make to Latakia and, more importantly, it will continue with our prayer for each other.

“Jesus has united us in our love and faith,” Bishop Chebie said. “That’s why you are always in our thoughts, in our prayers. We will pray for you, for the bishops, for the priests, for the deacons, for the faithful, for each one of you.

“Every time I come to America (and this is my fourth time) I learn a lot from you and that’s what I am so grateful to you. You are always in our thoughts and in our prayers.”

“Thank you. God bless you and God bless America,” Bishop Chebie said.

Thank you, Bishop Chebie. Because of you, God has blessed us already!

Remembering an extraordinary day

May the Peace and Joy of Christ be with you at this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

I promise to remember all of you and your families in my Christmas Mass.

I am truly grateful to you all for being a part with me in this column. Each time, I prepare to write a column I think of you all. Thank you!

I must admit that over the last few years my column at Christmas time has been the same: a remembrance of the most exciting day of my life.

So, I am certain you have heard this story before, probably often.

As you may remember, I was invited by Susan and Paul to accompany them to the birth of their second child whose name is Will. I continue to remember that day well and all that happened on that day.

I got down to Syracuse in time to join them on the way to St. Joseph’s Hospital. For various reasons, I was the only one with them that night. I felt very honored. I was able to be with them during the whole evening. I do remember overhearing one of the nurses commenting to the other nurse – “my goodness they even brought their own priest.”

I have been asked often when I tell this story what prayers I said during the birth. I must admit I did not pray at all as I was so completely taken up with all that was happening. My attention was absorbed by the birth and all that this new life meant. One of the nurses was right at my side to explain what was happening and, I suspect, to take care of me if I fainted. I didn’t.

Later, when I was allowed to hold this new born, I did take the time to pray – a prayer of gratitude for this child and for life. I prayed in hope that this child’s life would be filled with happiness and that he would find success in life.

I continue today to remember him in my prayers as he goes through his college experience. We now have a close bond – I held him right after his birth.

The memory of that day continues to remind me to pray for many – including Susan and Paul for involving me. Today I have been thinking of many more I should have prayed for back then.

As I observed that birth I do remember for involving me. As I observe that birth I remember my mother’s strength – her patience – her willingness to suffer for me.

As I remember this, today, I am grateful for that day. It was a very special moment. I talked about hopes and dreams for this child – for all the children in their family. It was a very special moment. I remember it well.

So, all these years later, I still remember and continue to be grateful for that day. It was truly the most exciting day of my life. I know there have been others. However, each Christmas that day still comes to mind. So, thank you again, Susan and Paul, for inviting me on that very special journey.
‘Jesus is uniting us in love and in faith’

Bishop Antoine Chbeir shares the story of his Syrian diocese with the church of northern New York

By Deacon Kevin Mastellon and Mary Lou Kilian

Civil war struck Syria in 2011. Originally the effort was to oust the Assad family which has run Syria since 1971. The war has become more complicated in motive and more violent since it started.

Bishop Chbeir began his visit in Watertown with a visit to Immaculate Heart Central School, and Mass at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse. The congregation was mostly priests, deacons and religious from the Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence deaneries.

Bishop Chbeir spoke in his homily at the Motherhouse about being Christian even to those who do not share our faith. "Because when you are Christian, you can not only think of yourself, but you'll go out of yourself to meet especially the people who are in difficulties, in need."

In Ogdensburg, Bishop Chbeir met a group of Catholic school children at the Bishop's house and then preached at a Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral.

"Last month we had a meeting in Damascus, the capital of Syria, for the Syrian Catholic bishops," he told the congregants. "We chose Damascus because it is bombed every day and for three days, we were bombed every day."

"I'm saying so because sometimes we are not aware of the gifts and graces that the Lord has given us...and we may take everything for granted," Bishop Chbeir said.

"When I found you have power every day, it's a little bit weird to me. When I find respect for the law and discipline, it is also a little bit weird to me."

"When I see the way the priests are serving the people and their parishes and the love the faithful have for their priests, I found it very beautiful," he said. "and I, myself have been feeling a lot of love and affection wherever I go."

"I would like to thank Your Excellency for everything you are doing for us, for the twinning, for the help you are giving to us, even before knowing each other, he said."

"You made me remember when I was first ordained a bishop. I knew about being a bishop of a diocese but a bishop is not just for his diocese but he's bishop of the church and has to serve the whole church all over the world."

"Because you are Christian, you are helping another diocese that is on the other end of the planet," Bishop Chbeir said. "Jesus is uniting us in love and in faith. That's why you are always in our thoughts, our prayers."

In Plattsburgh, the two bishops concelebrated Mass at Seton Catholic Central School.

Bishop LaValley told the students, teachers and community members, "this isn't a one-time thing. This is a relationship that continues to blossom, that continues to move forward.

"The relationship between the two dioceses began as a response to Pope Francis' call to help families and Christian communities remain in their native lands."

But that's something Bishop Chbeir said many Syrian families cannot do.

"In Syria, we have very bad and tough times. Our people suffer a lot," he said. "We have a lot of dead people, injured, handicapped, orphans and widows.

"We pray for peace in Syria and all over the world," he said.
Msgr. Leeward Poissant looks back on 54 years of priesthood

Scholar, rector, pastor... priest

By Shawn Ryan

Staff writer

PLATTSBURGH - A lot of life has passed before the eyes of Msgr. Leeward Poissant, now retired; from his seminary study in Rome during Vatican II, to his time as president/rector at Wadhams Hall, through his 27 years as a pastor and 54 years as a priest.

Msgr. Poissant's formative years in Rome, during the most important time in the modern Church, certainly colored how he carried out his ministries.

He fondly recalls the "simple pastoral nature" of Saint John XXIII, who affirmed, "I am a bishop of all the world." Msgr. Poissant's decade in Rome, during the years of his priesthood, surely shaped his present identity.

"I was deeply impressed by the simple pastoral nature of Pope (now Saint) John XXIII," he shared.

As for hobbies, Msgr. Poissant’s tastes may never change or be less hectic, but are certainly no less spiritual.

He relishes setting his own pace each day, and is capturing up on tasks some 40 years in the making like writing his book, "The Birth of the Messiah" which has been waiting for him to read since it was published. He considers his apartment a "haven" from the constant demands and challenges of the parish life he knew for so many years.

Though retired, Msgr. Poissant is far from done with his ministry, vowing to step in to help younger priests whenever they might be in need.

"When I retired I resolved to respond to whatever requests I received. I realize that sooner or later, as the years continue to roll by, I may need to make some prudent decisions about how distance and winter affect my abilities. For the present, however, I ask God to help me to do as much as I can for as long as I can."

Msgr. Poissant shares reflections about his priesthood here:

After 54 years of priesthood, what have been your greatest joys and challenges?

My greatest joy was to be ordained on my birthday, which was a remarkable coincidence and a wonderful gift which keeps on giving. Every year I am reminded of this blessing at the same time as I add another year to my life.

Close behind on the joy list are becoming a pastor for the first time 23 years and six months after my ordination and all my opportunities to work with children. Their simple faith and joy are infectious, and they make me want to recapture the joy of my youth, as far as humanly possible.

As for challenges, I am reminded of the old saying, “I have been down a lot of roads, and not all of them were paved.” Some of my more challenging roads were:

1. becoming the Bishop’s personal assistant (I never liked the term "secretary") after only 10 months in a parish,
2. trying to adapt to graduate study in philosophy while having little or no background in the subject compared to the other graduate students,
3. trying to complete my thesis and prepare for a defense while already a fully active faculty member at Wadhams Hall, plus becoming Dean of Students my second year and Vice President my third year,
4. facing the challenges and problems of being president/rector for five years, and
5. trying to be rector of the cathedral, with all of this assignment’s unique dimensions, while still teaching one philosophy course each semester.

Did your years of training priests at Wadhams Hall make a difference in how you ministered as a pastor?

I think it did. Certainly, I was affected by the deep spirituality and spirit of community. I also learned a lot about the importance of collaboration, communication, and compromise, and these all served me well as a pastor. You could say that I came from a good learning environment.

What was it like in Rome when you were in the seminary and then ordained during the years of the Second Vatican Council? How did that experience affect your priesthood?

It was an exciting time to be in Rome. We eagerly awaited the English translation of each council document and speculated on what it would mean for our ministry.

We were also deeply impressed by the simple pastoral nature of Pope (now Saint) John XXIII, who affected us much the way Pope Francis touches people’s hearts today.

Finally, Rome is always a powerful reminder of the history of the church and the time of the martyrs. I chose to celebrate my first Mass in a small chapel in one of the catacombs.

It was a reminder to me that a priest must be prepared to lay down his life, whether suddenly or a day at a time.

What has your life as a retired priest been like? Any hobbies of special ministries?

You can discover my expectations in the e-mail address that I chose: glenhaven5075@gmail.com. The numbers stand for 50 years ordained and 75 years of age when I retired. Glen is the name of the street I live on, and it also has a peaceful connotation. Haven indicates my hope that my retirement apartment and experience would be a haven from the constant demands and challenges of parish life.

So far it has worked out pretty much that way, with minor adjustments from time to time. Most days I can set my own pace, and now I have time for many things that I once put off until some indefinite future date. For example this Advent I am reading “The Birth of the Messiah” by Raymond Brown, which has been on my shelf untouched since it was published 40 years ago.

As for hobbies, my tastes have changed somewhat. There was a time when I was very interested in bridge, chess, and puzzles of any kind. Now my interests are less intellectual and less competitive. I enjoy outdoor exercise (walking, jogging, and golf when possible), watching my favorite sports on TV, recreational reading, and listening to classical music.

Ministries are usually the result of requests from other priests and include weekend Masses, Holy Day Masses, days of recollection, parish missions, and other special events. I think most priests would view the sacramental dimension of their ministry as the most satisfying and enjoyable, and I am blessed to be able to do that without the many other obligations.

Continued on Page 6
Among the 48 retired priests of the Diocese of Ogdensburg who will benefit from the 2017 Christmas collection are Msgr. Robert J. McCarthy, left; Father Richard S. Sturtz and Father Leo A. Wiley, above with Bishop LaValley; Msgr. Paul E. Whitmore, top right; and Father Daniel T. Keefe, bottom right.

Your personal generosity to the Christmas collection in your parish will support all retired priests of the diocese and benefit the diocesan and religious priests serving you today.

Your priests - retired and active - will appreciate your support!

Merry Christmas
Msgr. Poissant

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

With the wisdom garnered from your wide variety of priestly experience, what advice would you have for younger priests and all Catholics who call the North Country home?

Without making any claim to great wisdom, I would simply advise the younger priests to take time...time to pray each day, lest their ministry become hollow with no spiritual interior...and time to relax for at least a short time each day with something they really enjoy, lest they burn out from all work and no play.

I would advise the Catholics of the North Country to broaden their horizons from a narrow view of their own preferences (Mass time, Mass location, etc) to a more complete grasp of what everyone is going through. Their pastors can help them achieve this by being models of the collaboration, communication, and compromise so essential for the planning process.

What gives you the greatest hope for the future of the Catholic Church? What is your greatest concern?

It is almost impossible for me to identify any one concern as greatest, when there are so many of them and they even vary greatly by geographical location all over the world. However, I am convinced that there is always and will be hope in every situation because of the ongoing powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is impossible with God!

Any favorite stories you would like to share?

I have always liked to use stories in my teaching and preaching. I have a collection of hundreds of them. However, only about five are from my own personal experience, and I would like to share one those with you.

During the time that I was President/ Rector of Wadhams Hall I was on vacation in Toronto one summer, but it was not very relaxing. I was constantly worried about problems that I would have to face when I returned, even during my last meal before I left.

I was too wound up to enjoy a nice restaurant, so I was in a large two story McDonald's. I took my meal, if you could call it that, to the farthest corner of the second floor, where I could be alone with my anxiety.

As I was eating I saw a shabbily dressed man come up the stairs and start to put a narrow slip of paper on each table. I didn’t acknowledge him or even look at him as he left one for me. When he was gone I looked at the small piece of paper which had these words on it: “Be not afraid. I am always with you.”

I thought without really “getting it” that he could hardly go wrong with that, because everyone is afraid of something. But the surprise came when I got up to leave and looked at the messages abandoned on other tables. They were all different! Mine was the only one with that wonderful message of reassurance.

It was like I received exactly what I needed to see, and my trip home was a lot more peaceful than I had anticipated.

To this day, whenever I hear the song “Be Not Afraid” I remember that wonderful manifestation of God’s presence and providence in my life.

Any final thoughts?

I remember how many times retired priests helped me when I needed them during my 27 years as a pastor. I can no longer repay them, except with my prayers, but I can “pay it forward” by helping those who now need me.

When I retired I resolve to respond to whatever requests I received. I realize that sooner or later, as the years continue to roll by, I may need to make some prudent decisions about how distance and winter affect my abilities.

For the present, however, I ask God to help me to do as much as I can for as long as I can.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Diocesan Central Offices will be closed in observance of Christmas beginning Friday, Dec. 22 and will re-open for business on Tuesday, Dec. 26 at 8:15 a.m.

Rest in Peace

This week marks the anniversary of the deaths of the following clergymen who have served in the Diocese of Ogdensburg

Dec. 22 – Rev. Edgard Thivierge, O.M.I., 1975
Dec. 25 – Rev. Patrick Lyons, 1911; Rev. Oswald L. Bentley, 1940
Dec. 26 – Rev. Aloysius Hyacinth McMahon, 1936
Dec. 29 – Rev. John A. Mullen, 1887
Jan. 1 – Rev. Earl Leo Taylor, 1974

To Report Abuse

If you have a complaint of suspected misconduct involving diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, contact Victims Assistance Coordinator, Terrianne Yanulavich, Adult & Youth Counseling Services of Northern New York, 618 Lake Rd, Chateaugay, NY 12920; terrianneyanulavich@yahoo.com Phone: Day: 518-651-2267, Night: 518-569-0612; or Fr. Christopher Carrara, the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy at 315-393-2920, ext. 1340

Environmental Stewardship

Joy in the midst of darkness

In the midst of the shortest days of the year we welcome the winter solstice that marks the gradual return of the light and warmth of the sun.

During the Advent days we welcome the light and warmth of God’s love in our hearts. It is the light of the sun and the Son that brings us joy amid the pain and brokenness of all Creation.

Evidence of the light of joy amidst darkness of suffering is described by a Mercy Sister of the Americas in her blog:

“Many people know of the drama that the people of Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico have lived due to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma (and Maria). We who live in Peru also had a flooding disaster when, due to climate change, we had rains from the end of January until June 2017. It rained every day from 4 p.m. until 6 a.m. — not a soft rain, but downpours.

Although it is very hard to see people lose their farms, their only source of income, due to the change of the river’s course, it was outweighed by the solidarity of so many people. We saw a glimpse of what the Beatitudes mean: “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God” Matt 5:3.

Some of the darkness stems from the fact that we aren’t taking care of our Earth. The effects will eventually touch everybody, but first the most vulnerable are the poor. How can we believe that the darkness will not overcome the light? We must follow the example of the poor—live more simply and stand in solidarity with our neighbors in need.”

Prayer: Lord of light, fill our hearts with the joy of your abiding love. In the darkness of our world, give us courage to search for truth. Help us to welcome and empower those displaced by environmental crisis. Give us the passion to create a more just society. We thank you for the gift of life and the call to protect all that you have created. Amen.
My Christmas Moment

By Kathleen M. Gallagher
Director of Pro-Life Activities for the New York State Catholic Conference,

Unexpectedly, this year my Christmas Moment came in a church. Oddly enough, I don’t believe I’ve ever experienced one there before.

It was a glorious day in September, and I was helping to lead a conference and retreat for the state’s Catholic prison chaplains in beautiful Canandaigua, in upstate New York. The chapel in the retreat center overlooked the lake on a day when the weather was postcard perfect, sunny and 75 degrees.

I admit that I was not looking forward to Mass on this particular day. A Ukrainian Catholic liturgy was planned, something I knew little about. What I did know was that everything in this Eastern Rite Mass is sung – EVERYTHING – and it therefore takes longer than the Roman Catholic Mass with which I am familiar. Ugh. On a day like this?? Really?

Perhaps it was its novelty, combined with a large dose of incense, but I found the Ukrainian liturgy to be filled with profound meaning and reverence.

Singing the words kind of unlocked them for me, in a way that empowered me to understand them.

Each time the celebrant chanted “Be attentive!” it was as if God was speaking directly to me, and snapped me back from my tendency to either daydream or worry about what was next on the schedule. I had no choice but to partake.

There is much repetition in the Eastern Rite; many prayers and petitions are repeated three times. By the third time in each set, I heard the words.

The liturgy is flooded with prayers for peace, which seemed so timely and so needed in our violence-ridden world.

And there are lots of reminders that only God can offer true peace, in our hearts and in our cities, and only He is life-giving.

Many of the litanies from the Mass still echo in my head months later, and I find myself praying them as I go about washing the dishes or driving the car:

• Be merciful to me, a sinner.
• Heal my soul and my body.
• Enlighten my eyes and my heart.
• That I may no longer live for myself.

It was during the Prayers after Communion that I experienced the “Moment”... that instant when the essence of Christmas – Jesus Himself – penetrated my being and swelled my heart with sudden understanding and gratitude. I was completely centered on Christ, on seeing His face in the people around me, on viewing His beauty on full display outside the windows, on listening to Him in the stillness of my heart. I felt connected to Christ not only spiritually, but physically, emotionally, and intellectually as well. (When was the last time that ever happened to me at Sunday Mass? Honest answer: never.)

While we wait expectantly for the birth of the Baby Jesus, let us clear away the distractions of our daily lives so that we might make room for Him.

We can find Him, experience Him, and connect with Him in both likely and unlikely places.
Catherine Russell takes on new responsibilities

Bishop Terry R. LaValley has appointed Catherine Russell as the Assistant Director of Faith Formation for the Western Regional Office and Coordinator of the Formation for Ministry Program.

Her appointment becomes effective Jan. 1. Ms. Russell will continue her work as Diocesan Vocation Coordinator.

An educator for 40 years, Ms. Russell earned a bachelor’s degree from Regents College and a Master of Education in Counseling and Human Development from St. Lawrence University.

She has also received permanent New York State certification as School Counselor and English teacher. She taught in diocesan Catholic schools for nine years, was a public school teacher for three years and also worked as an English teacher for Jefferson Community College in Watertown. Ms. Russell worked as a school counselor at Crown Point Central School for 20 years and then served as principal in Seton Catholic Middle High School for six years before becoming Diocesan Vocation Coordinator in 2016.

She now lives in Massena where she is a parishioner of Sacred Heart Church.

In the Faith Formation and Formation for Ministry positions, she succeeds Deacon Patrick Donahue who has been named director of Catholic Charities.

Holidays can be challenging for families but they are opportunities for abundant grace. May God richly bless your family in this new year! Behold...I make all things new!

~ The Office of Family Life

May the blessings of that first Christmas be yours this season and always.

From Scott Lalone, Valerie Mathews, Renee’ Grizzuto
**CHRISTMAS SPIRIT AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Children at St. Mary’s School in Canton tell the story of the birth of Jesus in their annual Christmas pageant Dec. 13.

Immaculate Heart Central School in Watertown welcomed the Fort Drum 10th Mountain Division Band ‘Avalanche’ to the school Dec. 5. Mrs. Piatt, Major General Piatt’s wife, was in attendance; Mrs. Svedberg-Miller, English as a second language teacher at IHC, organized the concert.

Giving back at Holy Family School in Malone: Middle School students made cookies to sell to benefit Catholic Charities Senior Citizen food baskets.

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**Christmas Blessings**

St. Alphonsus - Holy Name of Jesus Parish

Holiday Mass Schedule:
Dec. 24th - 4 p.m.  
Children’s Mass at St. Alphonsus
Dec. 24th - 7 p.m.  
at Holy Name Church
Dec. 25th - 9 a.m.  
at St. Alphonsus Church
Author shares stories from his meals with St. John Paul II

Table talk with George Weigel

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

ROME (CNS) -- For some 25 years as pope, St. John Paul II would invite people to his table each day -- sharing breakfast, lunch, dinner and conversation with a wide variety of cardinals, bishops, theologians, writers and friends.

George Weigel, the author and scholar, was one of those guests on dozens of occasions and it was over a meal that he asked Pope John Paul the questions that form the core of “Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II,” published in 1999. The meals and conversations continued, providing information for the sequel, “The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II -- The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy,” published in 2010.

His last dinner with St. John Paul was Dec. 15, 2004. Now, Weigel is sharing the mood, anecdotes and reflections on the table talk in the more personal “Lessons in Hope: My Unexpected Life with St. John Paul II.”

“What people really wanted was not more heavily footnoted, annotated scholarly biography,” Weigel said. “What people wanted were stories, stories that would make him come alive again.”

Interviewed in Rome Dec. 12, Weigel said he decided to tell the story of our conversations, which took place over a dozen years. But for that to make sense, he said, he also had to write about events and experiences in his life that prepared him to understand the history, philosophy and theology discussed around the table.

Of course, he said, the conversations also included both lighter moments and personal ones, such as when Pope John Paul asked how Weigel’s mother was doing after his father died.

Sharing a meal and a table was important to Pope John Paul, Weigel said, because he “understood that a pope who relies only on the official channels of information -- nuncios, Curia, bishops' conferences -- is not going to get all the information he needs because that information is being filtered bureaucratically.”

“The table rather than the desk was his favorite point of encounter,” the author said.

The conversations gave the pope different points of view on the situation of the church, on issues of theology and on political and social realities around the world, Weigel said.

Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, once told Weigel that “major documents and audience themes would be hashed out over lunches in the papal apartments.”

But, he said, at the same time, friendships were very important to him and he made sure to nourish them at the dinner table.

Pope John Paul would ask his guests their opinions about books, films, world leaders and political situations. “He was the most insatiably curious man I have ever met,” Weigel said. “He always wanted to know what was happening.”

The pope's curiosity, he said, was less a “tic” than a sign that “he really did believe in the providential guidance of history,” which meant he needed to stay informed “in order to find the providential footprints.”

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Merry Christmas!

From the Diocesan Fiscal Office Staff

The North Country Catholic will not be published during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The next issue will be dated Jan. 3, 2017
Sunday has lost its sense as day of rest, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Just like a plant needs sun and nourishment to survive, every Christian needs the light of Sunday and the sustenance of the Eucharist to truly live, Pope Francis said. "How can we carry out the Gospel without drawing the energy needed to do it, one Sunday after another, from the limitless source of the Eucharist," he said Dec. 13 during his weekly general audience. "We don't go to Mass to give something to God, but to receive from him that which we truly need," the pope said. Sunday Mass is the time and place Christians receive the grace and strength to remain faithful to his word, follow his commandment to love others and be credible witnesses of the world. The pope continued his series of audience talks on the Mass in the Vatican's Paul VI hall, which was decorated with a large Christmas tree and a life-sized Nativity scene. A number of people in the audience hall handed the pope -- who turns 81 Dec. 17 -- Christmas cards, notes and a chocolate cake.

Number who view Christmas as religious dwindling

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The percentage of Americans who see Christmas as a religious holiday continues to slide across nearly all demographic lines. In a telephone survey of 1,503 U.S. adults conducted Nov. 28-Dec. 4 for the Pew Research Center, 55 percent said they mark Christmas as a religious holiday. The figure in 2013, when Pew last asked this question, was 59 percent. "Nine in 10 U.S. adults say they celebrate the holiday, which is nearly identical to the share who said this in 2013," said the survey, whose results were released Dec. 12. "About eight in 10 will gather with family and friends. And half say they plan to attend church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day," it said. Those numbers, Pew added, are roughly the same as those of 2013. "Most respondents in the new poll say they think religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less in American society today than in the past. But relatively few Americans both perceive this trend and agree that it's bad," the Pew survey said.

God does not lead us into temptation, Satan does, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The Italian and English translations of the "Our Father" can give believers the wrong impression that God can and does lead people into temptation, Pope Francis said. The Italian bishops' television channel, TV2000, has been broadcasting a series of conversations between the pope and a Catholic prison chaplain looking at the Lord's Prayer line by line. The episode broadcast Dec. 6 focused on the line, "Lead us not into temptation." Father Marco Pozza told the pope that friends have asked him, "Can God really lead us into temptation?" "This is not a good translation," the pope said. The standard versions of the prayer are translated from the Latin, which was translated from the New Testament in Greek. While he said nothing about ordering a new translation, Pope Francis noted how the French bishops had decided that beginning Dec. 3, the first Sunday of Advent, French Catholics would change the line to the equivalent of "do not let us enter into temptation."
SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Advent comes to a close

This Fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas eve this year. What a dramatic way to fulfill our waiting for the coming of our Messiah and Redeemer.

On Sunday morning, we will celebrate the end of Advent, and just a few hours later on the same day, we hear the Angels singing “Glory to God in the highest!” God has arrived as a tiny Child, helpless and shivering.

We are delighted and charmed at the way He chose to come without signs of frightening power. Simple shepherds from the fields are the first to hear the news.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday tells us that another Angel, Gabriel, was sent as God’s messenger to ask permission of a pure, holy maid to be His mother!

It is Mary’s “yes” that makes Christmas possible - the coming into humble flesh of the Lord of heaven and earth.

What is a mystery? It’s a truly factual and real work of God that is beyond all human understanding. Nevertheless, it radically effects our lives and our future. Both readings from Samuel and St. Paul tell us that the obedience of both Jesus and His mother to the will of the Father are models for us to follow.

We are urged to enter fully into the drama, of God’s plans for peace on earth, engaging in the building of His kingdom of peace and love. Advent has come to a close. The Savior has arrived.

What happens now? Our sharing with Jesus in the building up of the Kingdom.

One Christmas night

By Dr. Elmer Abear
Contributing writer

After the 6:45am Mass at Notre Dame Church by Father James Shurtleff, while everybody went home, I stayed behind and sat alone for an hour or two to pray my rosary and meditate before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

After an hour in prayer, the door on the left side of the Church opened. I saw an elderly woman about 50 years old dressed in black pants and red shirt, walking perhaps with arthritis. I expected her to kneel and pray in one of the pews.

But instead she continued to walk towards me. I was near the confessional box, some 200 meters from the door. Slowly she sat down heavy beside me: too close for comfort. I could feel her warmth: uncomfortable I knelt down on the kneeler. Stealthily, I glanced at her from the corner of my left eye but saw nobody.

It was out of the question that she stood up and walked away. Objectively, she just disappeared. I stood up and looked around: The Church was empty and she could not have run that fast, considering that she seemed to have an arthritis.

I was shocked and I sat down to reflect on this event. And suddenly I remembered that one Christmas night in 2004 before she passed away in 2005, my only daughter, Rossana, came to our Christmas party wearing black pants and a red shirt.

She was so beautiful that night that I kissed her on the forehead and said, “Sweetheart, you are so beautiful.” And I became emotional, not knowing that was our last Christmas together.

It left me with no doubt that it was Rossana who appeared to me disguised as an elderly woman. I prayed a Rosary for her that she might rest in peace at the other side.

Merry Christmas
from the Department of Youth Ministry
by John Mulderig
Catholic News Service

Despite the high price of a movie ticket these days, patrons are unlikely to come away from a showing of the engrossing sci-fi epic “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” (Disney) feeling shortchanged.

Vast in scale and operatic in intensity, this 152-minute visit to that galaxy far, far away is both satisfying and, for the most part, family-friendly.

With the mayhem inevitable in a movie about a war kept gore-free and only minor blemishes on the dialogue, parents may be more concerned about the non-scriptural notions centering on the famous Force that are here collectively referred to as the “Jedi religion.” Teens able to take this fictional faith, a sort of dime-store Taoism, as just one more element in a fantasy world will benefit from lessons about the value of hope and the true nature of heroism.

The “Star Wars” saga has often been characterized as the Iliad of contemporary culture. So perhaps it’s fitting that the opening of writer-director Rian Johnson’s eighth episode of the narrative initiated by George Lucas in 1977 finds Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) imitating Homer’s Achilles by holding aloof from the great struggle in which he once took an active part.

Rather than sulking in his tent, as Achilles did, Luke is leading a solitary life of self-imposed exile among the small stone huts of a distant planet. (These scenes were shot on the Irish island of Skellig Michael, site of a medieval monastery.)

His isolation is interrupted by the arrival of Rey (Daisy Ridley) who has come as a messenger from Luke’s twin sister, Leia (the late Carrie Fisher).

As the leading general of the embattled Resistance - the latter-day version of the Rebel Alliance for which Luke once fought – Leia urgently needs her brother’s famed skills as a warrior if the struggle against the fascistic First Order (successor to the evil Galactic Empire), and its malignant leader, Snoke (Andy Serkis), is to continue.

Luke refuses to join the conflict. But he does agree to train Rey in the ways of the Force. Rey will need the power of this mysterious spiritual energy, the source of Luke’s own prowess, when she eventually confronts Leia’s son, Ben Solo, aka Kylo Ren (Adam Driver).

Originally a good person, Ben has gone over to the side of darkness, and now serves as Snoke’s chief lieutenant. Even so, he still has some elements of good remaining in him, and his ongoing moral struggle has the potential to sway the outcome of the intergalactic battle.

Though it gets off to a slow start, once it hits its stride “The Last Jedi” sweeps viewers along with stirring action and audience-pleasing plot twists.

While not as taut as last year’s “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story,” this sprawling installment of the great franchise makes, in the end, for a more memorable experience.

The script’s portrayal of the Force as capable of endowing those who cultivate it either with goodness or iniquity may strike moviegoers of faith as establishing a false equivalence of power between these two poles of morality. Some may even see in this an implicit denial of the rule of divine providence and God’s ultimate supremacy over sin.

Yet, in keeping with a Christian worldview, characters do make their ethical choices more or less freely. And the idea that a change in basic identity should be reflected by a change of name echoes a recurring trope in Scripture - and in the church’s sacramental practice.

Audience members young or old are unlikely to spend much time meditating on these aspects of the picture, however. Instead, they’ll be content to ride this cinematic whirlwind while it lasts.

The film contains frequent but bloodless combat violence, a scene of torture, and a few crass terms.

The Catholic News Service classification is A-II – adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 –
FRIENDSHIP VOLUNTEERS

Tupper Lake - Mercy Care for the Adirondacks is recruiting new volunteers and has scheduled a Friendship Volunteer Training Program.

**Date:** Jan. 11 and 18

**Time:** 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**Features:** Volunteers from Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake help elder neighbors stay connected to their communities and helping to make their lives a little easier and happier.

**Contact:** Program is free of charge, but pre-registration is required. To request registration information, contact Jenn Grisi at Mercy Care, 518-523-5583 or by e-mail at jgrisi@akmercy.org.

MARCH FOR LIFE

**Plattsburgh** - Annual Plattsburgh March for Life to be held.

**Date:** Jan. 14

**Time:** 12:30 p.m.

**Place:** St. John XXIII Newman Center, to St. John the Baptists Church.

**Features:** Presentation at 1 p.m. Reception follows in parish center.

BUS TO MARCH FOR LIFE IN DC

**Plattsburgh** - A bus will be traveling to Washington, D.C., for the national March for Life.

**Schedule:** Meet at St. Peter’s Church, Plattsburgh Jan. 18 at 7:15 p.m., Jan. 19, March for Life and Leave Washington at 4:45 p.m.

**Cost:** $30

**Contact:** Deacon Randy Smith at 518-566-6229. Please leave a message with your name and phone number.

PANCAKE BREAKFAST

**Treadwell Mills** - The Knights of Columbus will hold an all you can eat Pancake Breakfast.

**Date:** Jan. 7, Feb. 4, March 4, April 22

**Time:** 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Place:** St. Joseph’s Church Parish Hall

**Cost:** Adults, $7; Children 6-12, $3; under 5, Free

EUCHARISTICADORATION

**Plattsburgh** - Eucharistic Adoration is held throughout the year every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

**Place:** St. John’s “Holy Family” Adoration Chapel, downstairs

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

**Plattsburgh** - The Sacred Heart Fraternity Secular Franciscan Order meets the second Sunday of the month.

**Time:** 2 p.m.

**Place:** St. John’s Holy Family Chapel.

FRANKLIN

HEARTSONFIRE

Malone - Hearts on Fire to be held the first Friday of the month.

**Schedule:** 7 p.m., Praise & Worship Holy Hour; 8 p.m., Bonfire, snacks

**Place:** Notre Dame Church

FIRST SATURDAY DEVOTION

St. Regis Falls - First Saturday Devotion and Holy Hour to be held.

**Time:** 4:30 p.m. anticipated Mass

**Place:** St. Ann’s Church

SPAGHETTI & MEATBALL DINNER

Evans Mills - Spaghetti and meatball dinner to be held to benefit the Adirondack Knights of Columbus.

**Date:** Jan. 6

**Time:** 4 p.m. to 7

**Place:** St. Mary’s Parish Center

LIFEFIGHT MEETING

Watertown - LifeRight meets the first Wednesday of the month.

**Time:** 1 p.m.

**Place:** 870 Arsenal Street.

**Features:** pro-life videos, books and educational materials for borrowing.

CURSILLO MEETINGS

Carthage - The Jefferson/Lewis Cursillo holds its monthly meeting on the third Tuesday of every month.

**Time:** 6 p.m. to 8

**Place:** Community Room of St. James

LEWIS

INTERNATIONAL CRECHES

**Houseville** - An exhibit of International Creches-Nativities is set

**Dates:** Dec. 21, Jan. 7

**Time:** The display may be viewed before or after the 11 a.m. Masses or between 1 p.m. to 3 or by appointment during the week.

**Place:** St. Hedwig’s Church.

**Features:** This exhibit is free and open to the public.

OPLATEK CHRISTMAS WAFER

**Houseville** - The Polish Christmas Wafer or OPLATEK is available from St. Hedwig’s Church.

**Cost:** $3 per package plus postage.

**Features:** The Christmas Wafer of OPLATEK is part of a Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak custom that is observed during the Vigil of Christmas (Wigilia). After the first star is visible, family and friends gather around the dinner table to share the OPLATEK. The OPLATEK is sent and shared with family and friends all over the world as a symbol of love, unity and forgiveness while wishing God’s Blessing on each other this Holy Night.

**Contact:** 315-348-6260.

ST. LAWRENCE

FIRST FRIDAY ADORATION

**Massena** - Friday Devotions are set featuring Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Holy Hour for Vocations.

**Date:** First Friday of every month

**Time:** 6:30 p.m. to 7:30

**Place:** St. Mary’s Church.

ST. RAPHAEL’S FOOD PANTRY

**St. Raphael’s** - An exhibit of Creches-Nativities is set

**Dates:** Dec. 21, Jan. 7

**Place:** St. Raphael’s Food Pantry

**Cost:** $3 per package plus postage.

**Features:** This exhibit is free and open to the public.

SPRITUAL BOOK CLUB

**Massena** - The Massena Catholic Community Book Club meets every Wednesday.

**Time:** 11 a.m.

**Place:** Parish Center

EUCHARISTICADORATION

**Massena** - The Polish Christmas Wafer or OPLATEK is available from St. Hedwig’s Church.

**Cost:** $3 per package plus postage.

**Features:** The Christmas Wafer of OPLATEK is part of a Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak custom that is observed during the Vigil of Christmas (Wigilia). After the first star is visible, family and friends gather around the dinner table to share the OPLATEK. The OPLATEK is sent and shared with family and friends all over the world as a symbol of love, unity and forgiveness while wishing God’s Blessing on each other this Holy Night.

**Contact:** 315-348-6260.

DOVICOMMENTS

**Canton** - The Diocesan Family Life Office has announced a new ministry for divorced Catholics.

**Date:** Dec. 20, 2017

**Time:** 6:30 p.m. to 8:30

**Place:** St. Mary’s Church

**Cost:** $25, includes program materials “Surviving Divorce Personal Guide”

**Features:** Surviving Divorce features twelve video presentations that cover topics such as shock and grief, anger and forgiveness, money issues, dealing with children and a former spouse, and annulling and remarriage.

**Contact:** Steve Tartaglia at 315-393-2920 or go to http://www.rcdony.org/family-life/surviving-divorcesupportgroup.html.

FISHERS CLUB

**Fishers Club** is about men gathering to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

**Date:** Groups will reconvene in early 2018, check parish bulletins, the NCC or one of the priests listed below.

**Contact:** Midlanders (Potsdam/Canton) Fr. Doug Lucia dlucia@rcdony.org, 315-348-4466 and Lakesiders (Plattsburgh) Fr. Howard Venette pastor.stbarts@roadrunner.com, 315-369-3554

DOVS MEMBERS SOUGHT

D.O.V.S (Diocese of Ogdensburg Vocation Society) is a group of people who pray for and work to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life in our diocese is seeking new members. DOVS meets most months, plan events to thank priests and religious and annually take a pilgrimage.

**Contact:** Call Connie at 315-265-2762 or Cathy Russell, diocesan vocation coordinator at the diocesan Vocations Office at 315-393-2920
Christmas joy in our world

There is light coming out of the darkness in the developing lands because of missionaries. Yes, missionaries like you, let the light of Christ shine in the lives of people in the missions as they receive your generous donations.

By virtue of our baptism, we are called to be missionaries.

On behalf of missionaries and the people they serve who benefit from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Missionary Childhood Association and the Missionary Projects of the Diocese of Ogdensburg, I thank you for your generosity and the gifts that bring Christ’s light into the darkness of the suffering and the poor in mission lands.

Yet, there is so much yet to do. There is still unthinkable suffering. We continue to reach out for your help and we pray for the strength and courage to do God’s work. Tomorrow is another day.

Another crisis can occur at any time. For now, we celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Pontifical Mission Societies accomplished so much good work and so many good deeds in the Mission Lands this year. Thanks to prayer and sacrifice, Christmas may be a bit merrier and brighter for so many who do not live surrounded by the safety net our land.

The Missions continue to deal with so much strife each day, but there are pockets of prosperity thanks to the generosity of our Diocese. Human Rights violations, disease, and treatment of the elderly are just a few of the issues that the Pontifical Mission Societies are currently battling to make a difference in places like India, Nigeria, Cameroon and Pakistan.

Ingenuity, restructuring, and technology are getting things done faster, more efficiently and delivered to where the help is more dire.

God bless the people working hard both here and abroad to make these essential improvements in our world all of Christ’s people.

Merry Christmas to you all. The Mission office wishes you all a very blessed day and best wishes to a happy new year. Again, thank you for your generous support. God bless.

Please remember “The Society for the Propagation of the Faith” when writing or changing your Will.

http://www.rcdony.org/mission-office.html

OBITUARIES


Canton — Debra Lee Ormsbee, 53, Funeral services Dec. 15, 2017, at Lawrence Funeral Home; burial in Hillcrest Cemetery, Heuvelton

Malone — Margarette M. Gobin, 70, graveside service Dec. 15, 2017, at Notre Dame Cemetery


Massena — Anneliese (Bopp) Reed, 92, Memorial Mass Dec. 31, 2017, at St. Mary’s Church


Morrisonville — Leigh S. Chilton, 72, Mass of Christian Burial, Dec. 15 at St. Alexander’s Church, burial in St. James Cemetery


Plattsburgh — Janet (LaBounty) Rivers, 90, Mass of Christian Burial, Dec. 15, 2017 at St. Peter’s Church; burial in Whispering Maples Memorial Gardens

Plattsburgh — Duwayne Seymour, 76, Funeral services at R.W. Walker Funeral Home; burial in St. the Baptist Cemetery, Keeseville.

Visit our website

www.northcountrycatholic.org

• Read Bishop LaValley’s columns
• Search archived papers
• View diocesan events and much more

Find us on Facebook!

Support And Pray
For Vocations

For a New or Used Car
Mort Backus & Sons
On Canton-Ogdensburg Rd.
315-393-5899

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Adirondack Center For PEACE
P.O. Box 2748
Plattsburgh, New York 12901
Phone: (518) 561-5083

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Adirondack Center For PEACE
and
Knights of Columbus Council #255

St. Peter’s Church
St. John’s Church

2018

Day
Date
Time
Day
Date
Time

JAN
Sat. 1/6/2018 8:15 a.m. Mon. 1/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
FEB
Sat. 2/3/2018 8:15 a.m. Fri. 2/9/2018 9:00 a.m.
MAR
Sat. 3/3/2018 8:15 a.m. Thurs. 3/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
APR
Sat. 4/14/2018 8:15 a.m. Sun. 4/8/2018 7:30 a.m.
MAY
Sat. 5/5/2018 8:15 a.m. Tues. 5/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
JUN
Sat. 6/2/2018 8:15 a.m. Fri. 6/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
JUL
Sat. 7/7/2018 8:15 a.m. Sun. 7/9/2018 7:30 a.m.
AUG
Sat. 8/4/2018 8:15 a.m. Thurs. 8/9/2018 9:00 a.m.
SEPT
Sat. 9/1/2018 8:15 a.m. Sat. 9/8/2018 4:30 p.m.
OCT
Sat. 10/6/2018 8:15 a.m. Mon. 10/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
NOV
Sat. 11/3/2018 8:15 a.m. Thurs. 11/8/2018 9:00 a.m.
DEC
Sat. 12/1/2018 8:15 a.m. Sat. 12/8/2018 4:30 p.m.

Our Lady of Victory:
One per month, date and time TBA

Please join us in prayer for a greater reverence for all human life!
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I have asked the youth of our Diocese to provide me with a cover design for this year's Christmas card. I received many fine pieces of art, many of which were captioned with verses from Scripture.

Bishop LaValley's Christmas message

One citation that surfaced on a few cards is from St. Luke's Infancy Narrative: "The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’" (Luke 2:10)

What an appropriate message for each of us to reflect upon this Christmas. We should give careful attention to this angelic proclamation that offers such hope and heavenly happiness to all people. Fear, bad news and division seem to be having their way in our world today. In the midst of such darkness, we remember that there is no reason to be afraid because God brings Good News of great joy for all of God’s people through His Son, born of Mary.

“Do not be afraid.” I need not provide a list of serious concerns that today cause so many to fear what tomorrow may bring. No matter the heartache, this is a season of hope and joy.

Jesus is the One who rescues humanity from sin and delivers us from the condition of alienation from God. With His birth, the Christ Child brings an unfathomable gift that we must unwrap to enjoy.

He brings salvation to all humanity. But in order to enjoy the salvation won for us, our personal encounter with Jesus must be tended to through a lifelong journey of love and service.

Just a few weeks ago, I consecrated the Diocese of Ogdensburg to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. We know that Mary submitted humbly and totally to God's will, even without fully understanding it.

By saying "yes" to God's mysterious will, she enabled salvation to enter the world through the birth of her Son. We must tug at her sleeve, she who desires so much to lead us, all of us, to Jesus. We want to follow Jesus. Christ-led and Christ-fed, we can be hope-filled and not weighed down by the menace of evil.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior and greet a New Year, let us unwrap the gift of salvation offered by making Mary's words our own: "Let it be done to me according to thy word."

May the Christ Child bring you and your loved ones the Gift of Love, the Blessing of Hope and the Promise of Peace. A blessed Christmas and joy-filled New Year!

Faithfully yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg