

**Saint Bernadette Parish**

**Saint Mary Parish**

1343 Wheeling Road NE (740) 654 • 1893  
LANCASTER, OH 43130-8701

602 Marietta Street (740) 569 • 7929  
BREMEN, OH 43107

[stbernadetteparish . net](http://stbernadetteparish.net)



### **What did you go out into the wilderness to see?**

The question about John the Baptist in today's gospel reading  
Painted (1690) in oil on canvas by Baciccio (Giovanni Battista Gaulli, 1639-1709)

Musée du Louvre, Paris

**the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent**

*DECEMBER 11, 2016*

## our parishes

### at both parishes

<b>Fr Thomas Kessler</b>	pastor	(614) 634-0499	<i>wnthomaskessler @ icloud . com</i>
<b>Kathy Kehnast</b>	pastoral coordinator	(740) 654-1893	<i>stbermparish @ yahoo . com</i>
<b>Angie &amp; Kent Kerns</b>	religious education	(740) 654-2588	<i>kwkerns @ gmail . com</i>
<b>Julie &amp; Chase Stalford</b>	youth ministry	(740) 808-7294	<i>maristellaspirt @ gmail . com</i>
<b>Nikki Schmelzer</b>	bookkeeper	(740) 654-1893	<i>businessstbparish @ yahoo . com</i>

### at bremen st mary parish

<b>Ben Factor</b>	liturgical music		<i>b_factor @ lancaster . k12 . oh . us</i>
<b>Jim Schmelzer</b>	maintenance chair	(740) 215-3894	
<b>Tyna Fox-Schmelzer</b>	religious education	(614) 371-7702	<i>schmelifox @ earthlink . net</i>
<b>Bremen St Vincent de Paul</b>		(740) 569-3710	
The St Mary Parish office is at the church vestibule.			
Hours are 9-11 AM, Tu	602 Marietta St, Bremen, OH 43107	(740) 569-7929	

### at st bernadette parish

<b>Deacon Mark Scarpitti</b>		(740) 438-3970	<i>dcn . mark @ frontier . com</i>
<b>Deacon Jeff Carpenter</b>		(740) 681-9918	<i>carpenter.277 @ osu . edu</i>
<b>Ann Essman</b>	pastoral minister	(740) 653-9347	<i>aessman001 @ att . net</i>
<b>Steve Huber</b>	facilities coordinator	(740) 654-3137	<i>shuber57 @ yahoo . com</i>
<b>Liz Latorre</b>	liturgical music	(740) 243-1872	<i>lizlatorre @ gmail . com</i>

The St Bernadette Parish office is in the Mary Good Center, across the back parking lot from the school.  
Hours are: 9 AM-1 PM, M W Th F; 11 AM-1 PM, Tu 1343 Wheeling Rd NE, Lancaster, OH 43130

### at st bernadette school

<b>Pam Eltringham</b>	principal	(740) 654-3137	<i>peltring @ cdeducation . org</i>
<b>Barb Huber</b>	secretary	(740) 654-3137	<i>bhuber @ cdeducation . org</i>

Saint Bernadette School is at 1325 Wheeling Rd, Lancaster, OH 43130-8701 *stbermlan @ cdeducation . org* [www . stbernadetteschool . com](http://www.stbernadetteschool.com)

## the sacramental life

### baptism

To have a child baptized, you must register and attend a class as a couple (unless attendance just isn't possible, in which case some discussion with Kathy Kehnast will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. The next session will be Wednesday, Feb 22. Take the class before your child is born. If you are expecting, call Kathy to register for the class.

Please don't ask if you "have to go." This is an opportunity to meet with parents of children about the same age as your little one; they are in the same wonderful boat as you are.

At least one parent must be a practicing Catholic. **Both godparents need to be practicing Christians, at least one a practicing Catholic.** If you don't attend Sunday Mass regularly, there is something you can do about it: Start coming to Sunday Mass. If you can't come (health, severe weather, employment requirements, etc.), speak to your confessor. He will help you.

### penance

The priest is available for Penance

- at St Bernadette Saturdays at 3 PM and Thursdays at 5:30 PM, and
- at St Mary Bremen on Sunday at 8 AM.

In addition to Advent and Lenten Penance Services, every Catholic priest is available whenever there is a need. There are Penance opportunities for parochial school children **four times during the year so that they will**

## let us pray together

### with the church this week

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**learn the** beauty of frequent confession. The Church's law requires us to receive the sacrament of Penance at least once a year.

### anointing of the sick

The Sick receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick **when dangerously ill, facing major surgery, or suffering from the ravages of old age.**

We celebrate the sacrament communally at a Sunday Mass before Advent and during the Easter season so that we can all pray with you for "health of mind and body."

And, we are happy to bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to the homes or hospitals of the sick or shut in. It is very helpful to **call the parish office to let us know before a hospitalization or when it has been too long** since the sacraments were last available.

### holy matrimony

Couples wishing to marry sacramentally should contact the parish office six months before they wish to celebrate the sacrament. Why so long? Because **this sacrament, not just the ceremony, requires serious preparation.** And the Church needs to be involved in that preparation. She tries to support couples through the years of their married life. That's why our diocese offers programs to enhance married life. To learn how, watch the weekly bulletin.

### with the holy father during december

His universal intention is that the scandal of child-soldiers may be eliminated the world over.

His evangelization intention is that the peoples of Europe may rediscover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Gospel which gives joy and hope to life.

# Mass times and intentions

at St Bernadette		at St Mary	
4 PM <i>poor souls in purgatory</i>	Saturday, Dec 10		
	Sunday, Dec 11	8:30 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	
11 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Sunday, Dec 11		
8:20 AM <i>Margaret Kessler</i>	Monday, Dec 12		
	Tuesday, Dec 13	8:20 AM <i>Frances Labrasca</i>	
8:20 AM <i>Wilford &amp; Loretta Beiter</i>	Wednesday, Dec 14		
6 PM <i>Abbott family</i>	Thursday, Dec 15		
8:20 AM <i>Carl J Messerly</i>	Friday, Dec 16		
4 PM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Saturday, Dec 17		
	Sunday, Dec 18	8:30 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	
11 AM <i>for the people of the parish</i>	Sunday, Dec 18		

## rite of acceptance

The Rite of Acceptance into the **Order of Catechumens** is the first of the “threshold rites” of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), and the first public ritual. In the Rite of Acceptance, a **change of identity** takes place: those previously known as **inquirers become catechumens**. They are **officially welcomed** by the Church as disciples, members (albeit not yet full members) of the household of faith. The text calls this rite “the first consecration by Christ as God’s own.” Last Sunday at both of our parishes, we celebrated the Rite of Acceptance as our inquirers stood among our parish communities and stated their desire to become baptized members of the Catholic Church, **Ralph Mohler** and his son **Bryant** at Mass at what is becoming their parish, Bremen St Mary, and **Jennifer Palmer** at Mass at her new parish, St Bernadette. They were presented by their sponsors and affirmed by our parish assemblies as they became catechumens. They received the sign of the cross and were assured of our prayers as they proceed in the RCIA to “learn to know [Christ] and follow him” and to prepare for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

## st bernadette midnight Mass

Midnight Mass is a beautiful tradition of welcoming our Lord’s birth in the “wee hours” of the morning. St Bernadette is the only parish in Lancaster to maintain the tradition of a Mass at Midnight. The Choir, joined by a brass ensemble, will begin with a vigil at 11:30 featuring a variety of Christmas carols. Consider starting a new tradition in your family by welcoming Jesus with us at Midnight Mass.

## youth choir

The **Saint Cecilia Society** (St Bernadette’s parish youth choir) meets on Sundays at 6 PM in the church. All parish students in grades 2-8 (public, parochial, or home school) are invited. SCS members in grades 4-8 are also invited to be members of the Handbell Ensemble, which meets on Sunday evenings at 7 PM, right after the full SCS gathering. **Mrs Latorre can answer questions** and provide registration materials after Mass, or you may call or text her at (740) 243-1872.

## adult choir

St Augustine once said, “**He who sings, prays twice.**” The St Bernadette adult choir has resumed practicing on Wednesdays at 7

PM in the church. Our adult choir is both a vocal ensemble devoted to **making beautiful music for the Lord** and a small faith family within our parish. We love to welcome new members into this family. Membership in the choir is an opportunity to be involved in the parish and grow in your faith. Contact Liz Latorre at (740) 243-1872 if you have questions.

## psr (aka parish school of religion)

PSR has begun but it is not too late to enroll students. Remember: Catholic parents have a **solemn moral duty** to see that their children are **properly and completely instructed in the Catholic Faith**. And they have a duty to see that their children attend every week (barring health or weather deterrents). And children will find **getting to know Jesus and his Church is an irreplaceable and joy-filled part of their upbringing**.

## sacristan / ushers

These are the people who make things flow smoothly during our Sunday (including Saturday evening) Masses. They get things ready, make sure all the other ministers are ready, and help late arrivals find a seat with a minimum of disruption. Would you like to help? Contact Kathy Kehnast or one of the folks you see doing the job.

## christmas baskets at bremen

The Bremen Community Food Pantry is in need of **turkeys and cookies for Christmas** baskets for families. Drop off ...

- **cookies** on Thursday, Dec 15, between noon and 6 PM and
- **turkeys** on Saturday, Dec 17, at 8 AM at the Calvary United Methodist Church.
- Bring **monetary donations** or **nonperishable food** items to Bremen St Mary Church.
- To make **other arrangements**, or if you can donate a turkey for the baskets, call Mary Shumaker at (740) 569-4796.

Baskets will be distributed on Saturday, Dec 17.

## giving tree at Bremen

Names of items on the branches of the tree in the parish hall are gifts for less fortunate children. These unwrapped gifts are due today. Thank you for your generosity.

## parish contributions

Last Sunday **St Bernadette parishioners** gave \$9,782 to the parish and \$851 to the parish educational support fund. And **St Mary Bremen** parishioners gave \$2,018 to the parish and \$624 to the monthly St Vincent de Paul collection.

### offering envelopes

Packets of offering **envelopes for 2017** are available on the table in the parish hall. If you do not find a packet with your name, take one of the packets without a name on it but with the lowest serial number. Write your name and the number of the packet on the paper for new envelopes.

### christmas flowers for your church

Donations to help defray the cost of Christmas flowers can be **given to the Lord in memory of a loved one**. Just put your gift in an envelope with the name of the loved one on the front and dropped in the collection basket in either parish.

### retirement fund for religious

Aging religious need your help. Senior Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests have offered their lives in service to others – educating the young, comforting the sick, seeking justice for the oppressed. Today, many are frail, elderly, and in need of assistance. Your gift to the Retirement Fund for Religious helps to furnish medications, nursing care, and other necessities. Please give generously to today's collection.

### advent drive for st vincent de paul

The Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society tells us that their biggest need these days is for non-perishable foods, paper products (kleenex, paper towels, toilet paper), personal hygiene products (deodorant, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes), and laundry products including detergent. So that's what they ask us to provide. Don't worry about too much of any of these items. There won't be too much, for the Society will share surplus items with the St Francis Center in McArthur. This drive will last **through the four Sundays of Advent**. Our drop off point will be in the vestibule between the school entrance and the church.

### friends forever

The next Friends Forever gathering happens on Thursday, Dec 15, at noon at St Bernadette. This is a lunch time gathering on a Thursday each month for seasoned citizens. Every one is welcome. The Advent Pot Luck features speaker Jane Acri from the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging. Call Ann Essman at (740) 654-1893 for details.

### where everybody knows your name

If you aren't already registered in our parish or if there has been some change in your household (as to who actually lives there or address, phone number, etc), please contact Kathy Kehnast at the parish office any morning.

## in the diocese of columbus

### catholic youth summer camp

Catholic Youth Summer Camp is Ohio's one week-long, residential high adventure camp for students entering grades 6-12. Activities typically include jet skis, water tubing, paintball, blobbing, high ropes, archery tag, zip lining, rock climbing, giant swing, and mountain boarding. CYSC offers **a truly Catholic and safe environment with daily catechesis that awakens faith and builds missionary disciples**. A week at camp includes daily Mass, adoration, reconciliation, small group conversations,

worship, service and authentic community. This is especially valuable for young people who are not now receiving other catechesis as well as to reinforce catechesis for those who are. Go to [www.cysc.com](http://www.cysc.com) for information and to register for 2017 dates: high school sessions run the weeks of June 11, 18, 25, and July 2; middle school sessions run the weeks of July 9, 16, 23, and 30. Registration is open now.

### happily ever after ... despite the rough spots

Come to a Marriage Encounter weekend and learn ways to use your marriage's ups and downs to deepen your love for each other and for God. Why not **try a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend**? The next weekend in central Ohio is Feb 17-19. For information or to register, contact Paul or Marilou Clouse at (614) 834-6880 or visit [www.wmcecolumbus.org](http://www.wmcecolumbus.org).

### vehicle donations to the josephinum

The Pontifical College Josephinum is a Catholic Seminary in Columbus. Seminarians there are studying for the priesthood and need transportation from time to time for a variety of local needs. The Josephinum has a fleet of vehicles but could use additional vans. If you have a **used van that you could donate** to the Josephinum and obtain an income tax deduction for 2016, contact their business office at (614) 985-2230 so delivery arrangements can be made before Dec 31. The Josephinum is a non-profit charitable organization and will provide you with the appropriate documentation for the donation of a vehicle.

### the gift of a retreat

Are you looking for a gift that is one size fits all? Why not give the gift of a stay at the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center? Their gift certificates are perfect for holiday gifts, thank you presents, anniversary presents or employee appreciation. Choose either a flat dollar amount or pick specific rooms, meals, and number of nights for a gift as tailored as you like. Gift certificates available by email at [info@stspeterandpaulretreatcenter.org](mailto:info@stspeterandpaulretreatcenter.org) or by calling (740) 928-4246.

### sts peter & paul retreat center needs help

Have you or a member of your family ever participated in a group or personal retreat at the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center? If you have, the experience was spiritually uplifting and rejuvenating for your soul. They ask for our prayerful consideration and our continued support of the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center. They need assistance through our tax deductible donations that will help **update and improve their facility**. They will continue to operate the Retreat Center in a frugal manner so that more retreatants will be able to enjoy the peace, tranquility and spirituality that Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center offers. The needed updates and required improvements to enhance current and future retreatant experiences include:

- energy efficient boiler system (replacing the unit from 1955)
- wifi accessibility
- refrigerated storage unit (compressors and condensers)
- air conditioning the chapel and north hall.

Mail your tax deductible donation to: Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center, 2734 Seminary Road, Newark, OH 43056.

### catholic record society

The Catholic Record Society, founded in 1974, is dedicated to preserving the history and bringing into better light the heroism of those who laid the foundation of today's Diocese of Columbus. The accomplishments of those early pioneers, despite tremendous hardships, is an inspiring and encouraging story for today's Catholic. The Society also supports the Diocesan

Archives, which preserves the official records of the Diocese. Meetings are held quarterly. Society members receive a calendar year subscription to the monthly *Bulletin*, the “Barquilla de la Santa Maria”, which contains records, accounts and illuminations of the people and events of the historic Diocese of Columbus. The Society maintains a wide variety of materials and records and responds to individuals seeking genealogical information or historical information on the parishes, institutions, religious orders, and clergy of the Diocese of Columbus. Basic membership is \$12 with digital Bulletin, \$25 with paper Bulletin, and an institutional subscription is \$35. Send check or money order before December 31 to the Catholic Record Society, 197 E Gay Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215. For information contact Chairman Mike Finn at fcoolavin@aol.com or (614) 268-4166.

## in the deanery

### advent and penance

It is the season to ... what? Shop? Decorate? Send cards? Give gifts? Go to parties? Do we do these things in honor of Jesus? Well, actually it is **the season to prepare the way of the Lord**. Those other activities may help us prepare the way of the Lord. Or they may not. They are not the main preparation. Turning our hearts to him is. Going to Confession is **how Catholics do that**.

We have Confession every Thursday at 5:30 at St Bernadette and every Saturday at 3 at St Bernadette and at 8 AM on Sunday at St Mary. That’s all year round because it is an all-year-round sacrament. To teach this lesson, we are trying to increase the frequency of Penance Services at St Bernadette School.

And during Advent, we will have **communal Penance services** with individual confessions (and extra priests to help make that work!) at each of the parishes and schools in our deanery.

The Sacrament of Penance is very much a part of Catholic life. But it is the easiest part to drift away from. The Church reminds us that we need to confess our sins, at the very least, once a year. We need it, even if we haven’t any very serious sins. Saint John reminds us bluntly that

“If we say, ‘**We are without sin,**’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.” *1 John 1:8-9*

If you have been away for a while, it is time to come back.

Decide which service or which Confession time you will attend this Advent. So you can prepare the way of the Lord!

<b>St. Bernadette</b>	<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Dec 11</b>	<b>3 PM</b>
Logan St. John	Monday	Dec 12	7 PM
St. Mark	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Dec 13</b>	7 PM
<b>St. Bernadette School</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Dec 15</b>	8:30 AM
Lancaster St. Mary	Thursday	Dec 15	7 PM
<b>Bremen St. Mary</b>	<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Dec 18</b>	<b>3 PM</b>

### logan concert

The Hocking County Children’s Chorus annual Christmas Concert, will be held at St John Church today, Sunday, Dec 11, at 3 PM.



### christmas cantata

The annual St Mark Christmas Cantata happens today, Sunday, Dec 11, at 7 PM. Admission is free. All are welcome.

## in the media

### christmas in the vatican

Enrich your faith this **Advent and Christmas with special programming throughout the season** on EWTN. Attend Mass in Vatican City with Pope Francis, enjoy concerts from Europe and travel to the sacred sites of the Holy Land.

### trial subscription to the register

Receive EWTN’s *National Catholic Register*. The Register is **the premier American Catholic newspaper**. It keeps you informed on everything happening in the Church and in the world — all through a faithful Catholic lens. Call 1- (800) 421-3230. This is not a paid ad. Just a very good idea for people who care about the truth of our Faith.

### pilgrimage to fatima and lourdes

Fr Stash Dailey, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Columbus, invites you to join him on a pilgrimage to Fatima and Lourdes from June 19-30, celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima. For details, contact Liz Grinder at the Lourdes Pilgrimage Office at (877) 276-7279 or lourdespilgrimageoffice@comcast.net or go to www.lourdes-pilgrimage.com. Reservation deadline is March 15.

### how to get ready for confession

Think about how long it has been since you last confessed, think of your sins, and make a firm commitment. Thank God for this gift of sacramental reconciliation and ask his help not to sin again.

### how to go to confession

**Priest:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
**Penitent:** Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (*how long?*) since my last confession, and these are my sins: (*confess your sins*).  
**Priest:** (*gives you a penance and perhaps some advice*)  
**Penitent:** (*pray an Act of Contrition such as:*)  
 My God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee.  
 I detest all my sins with all my heart because they have offended thee my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more, and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.  
**Priest:** (*gives you absolution*)  
**Priest:** Go in peace.  
**Penitent:** Say “thank you” and go back to your place in church to thank God and recite or do your penance as soon as possible.

### celebrate the birth

“Once a year the Church universal celebrates a solemn remembrance of the coming of great majesty, great humility, great godly love—and indeed a great glorification of ourselves. If only this might be celebrated always as it is done this once! After the coming of so great a King, what madness it is for people to desire, or to dare, to occupy themselves with any other business. Should

they not leave everything else aside and free themselves entirely for worshipping him, and in his presence be mindful of nothing else? ... Before Christ became a brother of human beings he became the child of a human being; he became a human being!"



—Bernard of Clairvaux,  
First Sermon for Christmas Eve

### ministers at Mass at st bernadette

	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion		
Saturday, Dec 10 4 PM	Sandy Landefeld	Clara & Susan Craaybeek, Eve Darfus	Tara Craaybeek Marguerite Grimm	Lee Guinan Bob & Angie Christy	Kathy Kehnast
Sunday, Dec 11 11 AM	Amy Woo	Logan & Tori Loy, Diana Woo	Nancy Griffith Larry Sanford	Anna Sevigny Jim & Rita Merk	David Shonk
Monday, Dec 12 8:20 AM	Mary J Vajen	Lexi Utz, Sarah Woo	Pat Dreyer	Kathy Kehnast	
Wednesday Dec 14 8:20 AM	Bob Christy	Becca Fuller, Brianna Hilyard	Mary Guinan	Mary Jane Vajen	
Thursday, Dec 15 6 PM	Kathy Kehnast	Joey Mannella, Carley Matson	Rosalie DeFillippo	Marguerite Grimm	
Friday, Dec 16 8:20 AM	Jim Merk	Jack Gentile, Mitchell Ortiz	Jim & Rita Merk		
Saturday, Dec 17 4 PM	Jennifer Spiegel	Kendall Cox, Gus & Olivia Spiegel	Susan Garrett Joyce Guenther	Denise McGuire Teresa Scarpitti	Mickey Steyaert Kathy Wagner
Sunday, Dec 18 11 AM	Terry Carpenter	Avee & Drew Solt, Jack Tencza	Pat Dreyer Sandy Landefeld	Ben Peters Jean Robertson	Mary Jane Vajen Becky Wickham

### ministers at Mass at bremen st mary

	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	gifts	sacristan / usher
Sunday, Dec 11 8:30 AM	Karen Wolfe	Sydnee Rogers Isaac Schmelzer	Leo Kunkler Sr, Pam Redding, Karen Wolfe	John Schoenlaub family	Damian Schmelzer
Sunday, Dec 18 8:30 AM	Joe Young	Reagan & Spencer Conrad	Dismas Schmelzer, Joe & Cathy Young	Joe Young family	Joe Young

### the Church's plan for reading God's word this week

Sat Dec 10	Sun Dec 11	Third Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 35:1-10	James 5:7-10	Psalm 146	Matt 11:2-11
Mon Dec 12	Our Lady of Guadalupe	Zechariah 2:14-17			Judith 13	Luke 1:26-38
Tues Dec 13	St Lucy	Zephaniah 3:1-13			Psalm 34	Matt 21:28-32
Weds Dec 14	St John of the Cross	Isaiah 45:6-25			Psalm 85	Luke 7:18-23
Thurs Dec 15	Advent Weekday	Isaiah 54:1-10			Psalm 30	Luke 7:24-30
Fri Dec 16	Advent Weekday	Isaiah 56:1-8			Psalm 67	John 5:33-36
Sat Dec 17	Late Advent Weekday	Genesis 49:2-10			Psalm 72	Matt 1:1-17
Sun Dec 18	Fourth Sunday of Advent	Isaiah 7:10-14	Romans 1:1-7	Psalm 24	Matt 1:18-24	

### confessions & weekday Mass nearby These times sometimes change, though, so be sure to call ahead!

Bremen	St Mary	8 AM Sunday	8:20 AM						
Lancaster	St Bernadette	5:30 PM Thurs, 3 PM Sat; 8:30 AM on 1 <sup>st</sup> Sat	8:20 AM	8:20 AM	6 PM	8:20 AM	1 <sup>st</sup> Sat @ 9 AM		
	parish	confessions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
Lancaster	St Mary	4 PM Saturday	7 AM	9 AM	7 AM	9 AM			
Lancaster	St Mark	5:30 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	6 PM	8 AM	8 AM		
Sugar Grove	St Joseph	½ hour before Mass	8 AM	NOON	8 AM	NOON	8 AM		
Circleville	St Joseph	4 PM Saturday	9 AM	7 PM	9 AM		9 AM	10 AM	
Logan	St John	4 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	9 AM		8 AM	9 AM	

# What Catholics Think About in Advent

Well, no, nobody can tell anybody else what he or she is going to think about. But this is a season for focusing on the permanent expectation of Christians for the coming of our God. He is actually coming. To bring judgment and salvation for his people. So the Church says to us: “Hadn’t we better get ready?”

About a generation ago there was a new mayor in New York who, whenever he met people on the street, would ask them, “How am I doing?” That is an important Advent question for each of us. How am I doing?

We believe that we were made to share eternally in the life of God. This life is the time for getting to know him by loving and serving him so that we can have the happiness of knowing him forever in heaven. So it stands to reason that the Church will invite us to think about how we are doing—in getting to be friends with him. That is why every Mass starts out with a call to consider: “Let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare to celebrate these sacred mysteries.” And a few times during the year she invites us to think about it and to face up to the fact that we really are not doing all we can to be ready for that encounter. And we are doing some things that make us unready or altogether unqualified to meet the Lord. Advent is one of those times.

A lot of us don’t go to confession any more. Maybe it would be better to say that we have been putting it off for a long time. Putting it off because we don’t want to be bothered, we find it uncomfortable, we wonder whether God really wants to put us through all that, we aren’t completely sorry, or we just don’t know how to put what needs saying into words. We each have our own reasons. But we have not been going to the sacrament. And the Lord gave us this sacrament because he knows we need it.

The sacraments are for our salvation. This one is for our—necessary—forgiveness of sins. I once heard a wise lady say that Jesus went to the trouble of dying for our sins, so we ought to take advantage of the wonderful way he has given us to let him apply that amazingly generous forgiveness to ourselves. You personally and me personally.

We need the sacraments. What happens if we don’t make good use of this one? One important thing is beginning to occur a lot with younger people: They don’t ever get the hang of it because they don’t get used to going to the sacrament. It was left to their choice without further discussion, and they didn’t feel they needed it. But when they really do need it (which always catches up with us), it doesn’t feel available, they don’t know how it works. It is very sad to hear a troubled young adult say in near desperation that she or he hasn’t been to confession since it was required in the second grade. The habit of the happy encounter with the Lord in the sacrament has not grown along with the person, and she hasn’t learned how to reach out for it. Now, coming to the sacrament feels like part of the problem instead of God’s loving solution. The same thing can happen when an older person comes to the sacrament after, perhaps, half a century. The help that could have been there, that could have been cultivating a life in friendship with God, just hasn’t been received.

How do priests feel about people who have been away from the sacrament for too long? Well, priests are sinners, too. [You knew that already, didn’t you?] For many of us, the same procrastination or escapism has kept us from the sacrament for a time. But most priests also remember the words of Jesus about the shepherd who rejoices more over the one lost sheep who has been found than over the other ninety-nine who were never lost. And for all the strange variety of men I have known among Christ’s priests, I have never known one who misused the knowledge acquired in the sacrament or expressed disdain for the penitents.

In the seminary, I was nervous about having to be the minister of this sacrament. I wondered if people would just come with a list of bad things to get cleaned up but with no intention of trying to change their lives. Or worse, would I learn more than I wanted to know about the depravity of human lives and about how much misbehavior was going on? I have found the experience to be exactly the opposite. Oh, yes, there is a lot of sin out there. But the beautiful surprise was seeing the very moving candor and trust in the Lord and in his Church — even in a sinful minister like myself—, trust that her or his sins were being forgiven. And what I had dreaded has instead become a very moving part of my experience as a priest and my own life of prayer. I have been enriched and taught by the faith of those sinners. And I have learned that the grace priests receive enables them to remember not the sin but the joy and peace of the repentant sinner.

Now it is time to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Now is the time to prepare the way of the Lord. It is never too late. But don’t let that be an excuse to postpone this blessing

— *Father Kessler*

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