



## **the Immaculate Conception**

celebrating the holiness of Mary on her feast which is this Friday,  
the feast day of Mary as patroness of the United States of America and a holy day of obligation

**Lancaster St Bernadette and Bremen St Mary Parishes**

The First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

## St Bernadette Parish.

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

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

cover picture: [The Immaculate Conception](#)

### our parishes

**Father Thomas Kessler** (614) 634-0499 [wmthomaskessler@icloud.com](mailto:wmthomaskessler@icloud.com)  
*pastor*

#### at St Bernadette Parish

<b>Jeff Carpenter</b>	(740) 681-9918	<a href="mailto:carpenter.277@osu.edu">carpenter.277@osu.edu</a>
<i>deacon</i>		
<b>Mark Scarpitti</b>	(740) 438-3970	<a href="mailto:dcn.mark@frontier.com">dcn.mark@frontier.com</a>
<i>deacon</i>		
<b>Ann Essman</b>	(740) 653-9347	<a href="mailto:aessman001@att.net">aessman001@att.net</a>
<i>pastoral minister</i>		
<b>Steve Huber</b>	(740) 654-3137	<a href="mailto:shuber57@yahoo.com">shuber57@yahoo.com</a>
<i>facilities coordinator</i>		
<b>Angie &amp; Kent Kerns</b>	(740) 654-2588	<a href="mailto:kwkerns@gmail.com">kwkerns@gmail.com</a>
<i>religious education</i>		
<b>Liz Latorre</b>	(740) 243-1872	<a href="mailto:lizlatorre@gmail.com">lizlatorre@gmail.com</a>
<i>liturgical music</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, MWThF; 11 AM-1 PM, Tu.

1343 Wheeling Rd NE, Lancaster, OH 43130-8701 (740) 654-1893

<http://stbernadetteparish.net>

#### at Bremen St Mary Parish

<b>Ben Factor</b>	<a href="mailto:b_factor@lancaster.k12.oh.us">b_factor@lancaster.k12.oh.us</a>
<i>liturgical music</i>	
<b>Sarah Borah</b>	<a href="mailto:sborah920@gmail.com">sborah920@gmail.com</a>

*The St Mary Parish office* is at the church vestibule.

Hours are 9-11 AM, Tuesdays.

602 Marietta St, Bremen, OH 43107 (740) 569-7738

#### at both parishes

<b>Stephen Karnes</b>	(740) 654-1893	<a href="mailto:stbernbook@gmail.com">stbernbook@gmail.com</a>
<i>business manager</i>		
<b>Kathy Kehnast</b>	(740) 654-1893	<a href="mailto:stbernparish@yahoo.com">stbernparish@yahoo.com</a>
<i>pastoral coordinator</i>		
<b>Julie &amp; Chase</b>	(740) 808-7294	<a href="mailto:maristellaspirt@gmail.com">maristellaspirt@gmail.com</a>
<b>Stalford</b>		
<i>youth ministry</i>		

#### Saint Bernadette School

<b>Pam Eltringham</b>	(740) 654-3137	<a href="mailto:peltring@cducation.org">peltring@cducation.org</a>
<i>principal</i>		
<b>Barb Huber</b>	(740) 654-3137	<a href="mailto:bhuber@cducation.org">bhuber@cducation.org</a>
<i>secretary</i>		

*Saint Bernadette School* is located at

1325 Wheeling Rd, Lancaster, OH 43130-8701

[stbernlan@cducation.org](mailto:stbernlan@cducation.org).

[www.stbernadetteschool.com](http://www.stbernadetteschool.com)

Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society	<a href="http://www.svdplancasteroh.com">www.svdplancasteroh.com</a>
Diocese of Columbus	<a href="http://www.columbuscatholic.org">www.columbuscatholic.org</a>
Angels Nurture & Disciple (AND)	<a href="http://www.angelsAND.org">www.angelsAND.org</a>

## St Mary Parish.

602 Marietta Street (740) 569 • 7738  
BREMEN, OH 43107

Painted (ca 1575) in oil on canvas by Federico Barocci (ca 1535-1612)  
in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino, Italy

### 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. Try to attend before the child is born. Next session will be in January. If you are expecting or have a new born or somehow haven't gotten around to having an older child baptized, call Kathy to make plans now.

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; those parents are in the same wonderful boat as you are.

At least one parent must be a practicing Catholic. Both godparents need to be practicing Catholics. If you don't attend Sunday Mass regularly (a major component of being a practicing Catholic!), there is something you can do about it: Start coming to Sunday Mass.

#### 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.

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

#### Anointing and Care of the Sick

We 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."

We bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to 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 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. Remember, Catholics who marry outside the Church have left the sacramental life and need to change that situation before receiving the other sacraments.

The Church wishes to support couples **through the years** of their married life. That's why our diocese offers programs to enhance married life. To learn about these programs, watch the weekly bulletin.

## Praying with the Church

### At Mass this Sunday the Church Prays

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. 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.

### In December the Pope Asks Us to Pray

That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations.

### Listen to God's Word and Honor His Saints

<b>Sunday, Dec 3,</b>	Isaiah 63:16-64:7	Psalm 80		
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday Advent</b>	1 Corinthians 1:3-9	<b>Mark</b>	<b>13:33-37</b>	
Mon, Dec 4	Isaiah 2:1-5	Psalm 122	Matt 8:5-11	Saint John Damascene, priest & doctor of the Church
Tues, Dec 5	Isaiah 11:1-10	Psalm 72	Luke 10:21-24	
Weds, Dec 6	Isaiah 25:6-10	Psalm 23	Matt 15:29-37	Saint Nicholas, bishop
Thurs, Dec 7	Isaiah 26:1-6	Psalm 118	Matt 7:21-27	Saint Ambrose, bishop & doctor of the Church
<b>Fri, Dec 8</b>	Genesis 3:9-20	Psalm 98		
	Ephesians 1:3-12		<b>Luke 1:26-38</b>	
	<b>The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary</b> <b>Patronal Feast of the United States of America</b>			
Sat, Dec 9	Isaiah 30:19-26	Psalm 147	Matt 9:35-10:8	Saint Juan Diego
<b>Sunday, Dec 10,</b>	Isaiah 40:1-11	Psalm 85		
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Advent</b>		2 Peter 3:8-14	<b>Mark</b>	
			<b>1:1-8</b>	

### Mass Intentions This Week

Monday, Dec 4	8:20 AM	Mary Lou Beiter	at St Bernadette
Tuesday, Dec 5	8:20 AM	Marie Young	at Bremen St Mary
Wednesday, Dec 6	8:20 AM	Raymond Shaw	at St Bernadette
Thursday, Dec 7	6 PM	Loretta A Schmelzer	at St Bernadette
Friday, Dec 8	8:20 AM	for the people	at St Bernadette
Friday, Dec 8	NOON	for the people	at Bremen St Mary
Friday, Dec 8	6 PM	for the people	at St Bernadette

### The Immaculate Conception

The feast of the **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary** celebrates the astonishing fact that at the beginning of Mary's existence, when she was conceived in her own mother's womb, she was already **free from original sin**. The feast will be observed at Mass on Friday, Dec 8, at

- 8:20 AM and 6 PM at St Bernadette and at
- noon at St Mary Bremen.

That day we affirm our belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived in her own mother's womb without the stain of sin.

It is a **holy day of obligation**, so Catholics have a **serious obligation** to assist at Mass on this day, just as they do on every Sunday. For most of the holy days of obligation, when they occur on a Saturday or a Monday, the bishop excuses us from the obligation. This is not the case for the great feast of Christmas or for this, the patronal feast of the United States of America. So we **need** to get to Mass on Friday. Go and you'll be glad you did.



## At Both Parishes

### A Surprising Advent Bible Study

Come and learn **how to read and how to pray** the four surprising liturgical prayers and three of the surprisingly moving joyful mysteries embedded in the two infancy chapters of the Gospel of Saint Luke. Father Kessler will lead these Advent reflections (with some gorgeous illustrations!) on Mondays, Dec 4, 11, and 18 from 7-8:30 PM.

### May They Rest in Peace

Please pray for the repose of the souls of

- **Dale McKenzie** of St Bernadette Parish, who died on Nov 20, and
- **Todd Householder Jr**, son of Todd and Christina Kunkler Householder Sr, who also died on Nov 20, and
- **Dr Richard Usilton**, recently received into the Catholic Church at St Bernadette Parish, who died Nov 28.

May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed rest in peace.

### 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 that collection next Sunday.

### Parish School of Religion

At both St Bernadette and Bremen St Mary Parishes, PSR meets **each Sunday** at 9:30 AM. Catholic parents are reminded of their solemn moral duty to see that their children are properly and completely instructed in the Catholic Faith. They need to see that their **children attend regularly** (barring health or weather deterrents). Even if some weeks they are reluctant to attend, the children will find getting to know Jesus and his Church to be an **irreplaceable and joy-filled part of their upbringing**. And **parental firmness a blessing** that they may not acknowledge right away.

### Representatives

The pastor is **still** requested to appoint

- two parishioners from each parish to represent their parish on the Fairfield / Hocking / Pickaway County **deanery pastoral council** (DPC)  
The DPC meets **bi-monthly** on a Monday evening for about an hour at a different parish each meeting. Parishioners with some experience on parish pastoral council make especially good representatives because they can share and work together on concerns common to all of the parish communities.

He is on the lookout for St Bernadette parishioners to serve on the

- **Lancaster St Mary School Advisory Board** and
- **Fisher Catholic High School Advisory Board**.

The school boards each meet **monthly** in the evening during the school year. They serve to keep communications happening between their own parish and the Catholic schools.

Each rep is a volunteer appointed by the pastor for a fixed term. A school advisory board member need not be a parent or an alum of the school concerned. They help keep the pastor and the corresponding councils in our own **parishes in the loop**. Several of the

positions are already staffed, but we always need a “strong bench” of people to help. Let Fr Kessler of your interest.

## Parish Contributions What You Gave in the Collection in November

St Bernadette	Nov 5	Nov 12	Nov 19	Nov 26	Totals
weekly	7,542	8,978	11,146	4,533	<b>32,199</b>
electronic funds transfer	2,664	176	176	176	<b>3,192</b>
Sandwich Saturday	0	20	0	0	<b>20</b>
educational support	631	140	60	70	<b>901</b>
All Saints	1,014	0	0	20	<b>1,034</b>
<b>Total given to the parish</b>	<b>11,851</b>	<b>9,314</b>	<b>11,382</b>	<b>4,799</b>	<b>37,346</b>
Campaign for Human Development	25	25	271	20	<b>341</b>
<b>Total sent beyond the parish</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>341</b>

Bremen St Mary	Nov 5	Nov 12	Nov 19	Nov 26	Totals
weekly	2,728	1,152	4,467	746	9,093
All Saints	58	20	0	0	78
Sacred Heart Cemetery	298	65	75	10	448
<b>Total given to the parish</b>	<b>3,084</b>	<b>1,237</b>	<b>4,542</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>9,619</b>
Campaign for Human Development	0	0	50	20	<b>70</b>
St Vincent	471	65	420	120	<b>1,076</b>
<b>Total sent beyond the parish</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>1,146</b>

## Catholic Foundation News

Giving becomes convenient and personal with a Donor Advised Fund, which offers a **hands-on approach to philanthropy**. This fund invests your charitable gift to grow tax-free for future giving. It lets you make contributions to multiple Catholic or public organizations from one account, and it can be set up with as little as \$5,000. It is convenient and flexible, with these key benefits:

- Immediate tax deduction with the option of deferred charitable distribution
  - Consolidates your charitable giving, providing administrative convenience
  - Flexibility to choose multiple grant recipients
  - Ability to add to the fund at any time
  - Make donations anonymously, if desired
  - Wish to create a family legacy of faith – name your children, grandchildren or other loved ones as successor advisors to the fund
- Generosity and acts of charity are family traits. You are encouraged to engage all generations of your family in your giving. For information contact Scott Hartman at The Catholic Foundation at (614) 443-8893 or [shartman@catholic-foundation.org](mailto:shartman@catholic-foundation.org).

## at Bremen St Mary Parish

### St Vincent de Paul

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Bremen takes up a **collection on the first Sunday** of each month. St Vincent always needs members. Call Angi Skinner at (740) 438-0027 if you can help.

## Ministry at Mass at St Mary

8:30 AM Sunday Mass	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	gifts	sacristan / usher
Dec 3	Paul Kunkler	Isaac Schmelzer, Nicole Terry	Irene Kunkler, Joe & Cathy Young	Paul Kunkler Family	Joe Young
Dec 8 NOON	Jeanne Schmelzer	Holy Day Mass			Jim Schmelzer
Dec 10	Linda Qualls	Brooke Holt, Jillian Wilkinson	Neil Boch, Wyatt Borah, Tyna Schmelzer-Fox	Catherine Noll, April Schmelzer	Joe Young

## Christmas Baskets

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

- **cookies** on Thursday, Dec 14, between noon and 6 PM and
- **turkeys** on Saturday, Dec 16, 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 16.

## at St Bernadette Parish

### Advent Family Fun Day

Begin the Advent Season with an Advent Family Fun Day today, Dec 3, from 12-2 PM in the St Bernadette parish hall. There will be seasonal crafts and cookie making, as well as an opportunity to purchase Advent Wreaths and seasonal books. It will include a **Parish Family Lunch** pot luck. Contact Kara Tencza at [Kara.tencza@gmail.com](mailto:Kara.tencza@gmail.com) for information.

### 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. The Society has a new website; you can learn about the many activities of the Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society at [www.svdplancasteroh.com](http://www.svdplancasteroh.com)

### Friends Forever

The next Friends Forever gathering happens on Thursday, Dec 21, at noon at St Bernadette. This is a **lunch time gathering** on a Thursday each month for **seasoned citizens**. Everyone is welcome. For details about the Advent Pot Luck, call Ann Essman at (740) 654-1893.

### Youth Choir

The **Saint Cecilia Society** (our parish youth choir) has begun its seventh season, and meets Sundays at 6 PM in the church. All parish students in grades 2-8 (public, parochial, or home school) are invited to join. SCS members in grades 4-8 are also invited to be members of the **handbell ensemble**, which meets Sunday evenings at 7 PM, immediately after the full SCS meeting. Mrs Latorre is happy to answer questions and provide registration materials. See her after Mass or call or text her at (740) 243-1872.

## Adult Choir

St Augustine once said that, “**he who sings prays twice**”. The Saint Bernadette Adult Choir practices on **Wednesdays at 7 PM** in the church. The choir is a vocal ensemble devoted to making beautiful music for the Lord and a small faith group within our parish family. We would love to welcome some new members into the group. Might membership in the choir be an opportunity for you to get involved in the parish and grow in the Faith? Contact Liz Latorre after Mass or call or text her at (740) 243-1872 if you have any questions.

## 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 a parish that maintains 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.

## Book Fair

Hundreds of children’s books, as well as religious books, adult best-sellers, and unique cookbooks, will be available for purchase at the St Bernadette Scholastic Book Fair in the school library. The Book Fair will be open before and after Vigil and Sunday Mass on Dec 2 and 3. Funds raised during this Fair will be used to **purchase TVs and DVD players for our classrooms**, replacing televisions which are more than 20 years old. Any donation in lieu of book purchases will be gladly accepted in the school office.

## Ministry at Mass at St Bernadette

Dec 3-10	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	
<b>Saturday 4 PM</b>	Brad Rider	Mallory, Mason & Mitchell Ortiz	Tara Craaybeek Rosie DeFillippo Joyce Guenther	Teresa Scarpitti Shelia Taylor Kathy Wagner
<b>Sunday Dec 3 11 AM</b>	David Shonk	Collin & Emma McCrady, Caroline Messerly	Teresa Carpenter Pat Dreyer Jim & Rita Merk	Pat Gins Jean Robertson
Monday 8:20 AM	Mary Jane Vajen	Olivia Reynolds, Amelia Robertson	Patricia Dreyer	Kathy Kehnast
Weds 8:20 AM	Bob Christy	Kyndra Nagle, Hyde O’Rielley	Angie Christy	Mary Jane Vajen
Thursday 6 PM	Kathy Kehnast	Morgan Cox, Silus Hopkins	Lee Guinan	Paul Lonergan
<b>Holy Day Mass Friday 8:20 AM</b>	Jim Merk	Isabelle Lazar, Daschel Neighbor	Rita Merk Mickey Steyaert	Mary Jane Vajen
<b>Holy Day Mass Friday 6 PM</b>	Kathy Kehnast	Anna Hartig, Addy Myers	John & Teresa Hartig Rosalie DeFillippo	
<b>Saturday 4 PM</b>	Bob Christy	Samantha Kerns, Joey Mannella, Carley Matson	Angie Christy Susan Garrett Jim & Becky Kuhn	Marguerite Grimm Sandy Landefeld
<b>Sunday Dec 10 11 AM</b>	Amy Woo	Diana & Sarah Woo, Brennan Quaintance	Jean Robertson Anna Sevigny John & Teresa Hartig	David Shonk Becky Wickham

## Sandwich Saturday

School has started and the students are serving our community by participating in the “Sandwich Saturday” program. This is a service project for students to live their discipleship by making **sandwiches for Foundation Dinners**, usually on **the last Thursday of each month**. The kids begin this service from an early age. Monetary donations, and donations of bread, lunch meat and wrapped cheese slices are always welcome and can be made through the school or parish office. Contact the school office for information at (740) 654-3137.

## Here and There

### EWTN Advent & Christmas Programming

EWTN brings you live Christmas Eve and Christmas Day **Masses from Rome and the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington, DC**. They will air inspiring musical performances, specials for children and teens, and new holiday presentations for all the family. Watch or listen to EWTN TV & Radio on your local channel, online, or on your smartphone. For information, go to ewtn . com.

### Angels Nurture & Disciple

**Angels Nurture & Disciple (AND)** reaches out to single mothers to provide emotional support and spiritual guidance in the form of a **Guardian Angel** (a mentor) at the most critical time in a woman’s life. Currently, AND has more single mothers in need than Guardian Angels to offer support and guidance. **They need your help**. Will you prayerfully consider these roles?

guardian angel      baby shower host      testimony speaker  
meal provider      angel assistance      transporter

Visit angelsAND . org, or contact Gina @ angelsAND . org.

### Holy Land Pilgrimage

Have you considered adding a new dimension of understanding regarding your Christian history and the life of Jesus? Father Nic Ventura invites you to join him on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Israel. Travelers will experience the places where Jesus walked, lived, taught, and performed miracles. Mass will be celebrated daily at various holy sites. The dates for this spiritual journey are Feb 21-Mar 2. The cost is \$3179 per person with breakfast, dinner, fees, and tips included. For information, contact Aimee Walton [frnicpilgrimage @ gmail . com](mailto:frnicpilgrimage@gmail.com) or (740) 225-6136.

## In the Diocese of Columbus

### Catholic Record Society

The quarterly meeting of the Catholic Record Society happens on Sunday, Dec 10, at 2 PM at the Columbus Historical Society, 717-719 West Town Street, Columbus. The speaker will be William Heyer, architect, who will present “Church Architecture and Beauty: the Struggles and Rewards of Designing with Traditional Architecture.” He will be talking about sacred spaces, people, and challenges and rewards in his recent work for the diocese of Columbus and the Pontifical College Josephinum. Mr Heyer is the owner of a classical architecture studio located in Bexley, and he recently completed the restoration of the main seminary chapel at the Josephinum and built the new Sacred Hearts Church in Cardington. The meeting will be in the new location of the Columbus Historical Society, at the west side of the building at 719 West Town Street, which is on the southwest corner of the Route 315 South exit, with plenty of free parking and with handicapped-accessibility. For information contact Chairman Mike Finn at [fcoolavin @ aol . com](mailto:fcoolavin@aol.com) or (614) 268-4166.

### Music Together from Many Sources

The Martin de Porres Center at 2330 Airport Dr, Columbus, a ministry of the Dominican Sisters of Peace, will host the St Anthony Church Multicultural Choir on Sunday, Dec 10, at 3 PM for a Christmas concert of traditional and multicultural music. Come for this festive concert, view the art exhibits, and enjoy refreshments during this busy holiday season. For information, call (614) 416-1910.



# Saint Nicholas, the Advent Saint

The saint who seems to get the most attention during Advent is Saint Nicholas, aka Santa Claus. I believe in Saint Nicholas. I don't mean the "yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" stuff. That was the answer to the most famous letter to the editor ever, written in 1897 by a little girl named Virginia to the editor of the *New York Sun*. She asked about Santa Claus because her father had told her that she could completely count on whatever she would read in the newspaper.

The editor answered Virginia that we need to have the humility to suspend our disbelief. He reminded Virginia that love, generosity, and devotion really do exist, that childlike faith, poetry and romance make life tolerable, give us enjoyment that goes beyond sense and sight. And he was certainly right that "Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world." He added that "Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond."

But **the editor's insight was not quite good enough**. There certainly is something beyond; there is someone. He is our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We need to believe in God. But **something is true not just because I want to believe or just because I can't imagine getting along without that belief**. I believe in God because I am convinced he has given me good cause to believe in his divine revelation. But that belief is not like belief in fairies or the Easter Bunny or in Santa Claus. The mythical stories of those fanciful beings may be charming, but they were invented by people who wanted to say something heart-warming. The editor was right to summon Virginia – and all his readers – back to the humility that sees that there is more to life than meets the eye. Parents can share with their small children the enjoyment of such dreamy little lessons about the goodness and generosity that there are in the world. But this is not the faith that we can build our lives upon. When we believe, we are making a choice to accept what we cannot know merely from experience. But we make such a choice because we are convinced that what we are believing is true, not simply because it makes life nicer or because we just want to. Belief is bigger than that.

Funny thing is that, though I don't really believe in the Easter Bunny or in the tooth fairy or in any of that sort of thing, there is **something about Santa Claus that I believe is factually true**. Not the North Pole business or the eight reindeer. Not the Jolly Old Elf in Santa's toyshop. Not any wishful thinking. No, I mean **the real deal**. There really was a man named Saint Nicholas. Not in the dreamy way that myths and legend help us to pretend that someone lived because we would like it better if they really did. No, **he really lived**. And he died. I have been to his tomb. And I believe that **he will live eternally**. For, you see, there was this historical character who lived and died and now shares in the eternal life. His life set a very good example for the rest of us about what life is really all about. His story is definitely worth getting to know.

This Santa Claus who occupies children's imagination in the month of December was actually **a bishop named "Nicholas."** ("Santa Claus" is a familiar way of abbreviating his name in another language.) And Nicholas lived in the seaport of Patara in the region of Myra in what is known today as Turkey. When Nicholas was living, the Turks lived a long way to the East and where he lived was a part of the Greek world. He was born about the year 270 and lived until 343. Because he was such a remarkably kind and generous man, a lot of legends have grown up about him in many different cultures, stories which show a widespread delight in this man.

He was raised as a Christian by wealthy parents. He was deeply religious from his childhood, and he grew up to become a priest and later a bishop. As a young man **Nicholas suffered under a persecution of Christians**. He spent time in prison and in exile for his faithfulness to the Catholic Faith when it was bitterly persecuted. He survived. Later as a bishop **he participated in the first ecumenical council of the Church**. The Fathers of the Council courageously condemned the false teaching that Jesus was not truly God; they **insisted on the true faith of Christians that Jesus was "consubstantial" with the eternal Father**.

Perhaps the best known and most beloved of all the many stories of Nicholas told how he helped **a poor man with three daughters**. In those days, a young woman's father had to offer her prospective husband something of value – a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, seemed to be doomed to be sold into slavery. The poor father was too proud to accept charity. Nicholas realized the man's poverty but understood the man's embarrassment. So, on three different nights, **he threw a bag of gold through an open window into in the poor man's home, providing the needed dowries**. Only much later did the poor man realize where the charity had come from.

This story recalls the same wonderful love for young people (and their practical need for a sufficient prosperity to begin a marriage without anxiety) that Jesus showed by changing the water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. **Nicholas was Christ-like not only in his generosity in general but also in his care for people facing marriage. Nicholas's delivery system for his gifts for the young women was embellished through the ages**. An old account says that the bags of gold, which Bishop Nicholas tossed through the open window, landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. This led to the custom of **children hanging stockings or putting out shoes**, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. But St Nicholas the gift-giver didn't keep a list of who was naughty or nice. And he **certainly didn't ask what they wanted for Christmas. The donor was secretive about his gift because he just wanted to be generous, not to be famous for his generosity**. And his generosity showed a profound respect for holy matrimony.

Nicholas died on Dec 6, 343 — that's 1674 years ago this Wednesday. He was buried in his hometown, but nearly a thousand years later, after that area was conquered by Muslim Turks and his tomb began to be neglected, Italian seafarers took the casket away to a church in Bari, a city on the coast of Southern Italy. **If you go to Bari today, as I did almost 40 years ago, you can visit the resting place of this generous man**. You might remember how you dealt with the reality of Santa Claus when you were too old to settle for the reindeer and the question about what you want for Christmas. And you might say a little prayer that his spirit of faithfulness to the truth about Jesus, his spirit of quiet generosity to people in need in their family life, and especially his special concern to help young people facing holy matrimony may be part of your life too.

— Father Kessler

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