



CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY THROUGH EPIPHANY DECEMBER 29, 2013 – JANUARY 4, 2014

For the past 18 months the Diocese of Gaylord has been involved in an extensive process leading us to discern a Mutually Shared Vision for the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Lower Michigan. On November 24, 2013, which closed the "Year of Faith," the diocese released a vision document titled, "Shining Christ's Light; Sunrise to Sunset," sharing insights gained through the process and revealing a plan for the future. The entire document is available at parish offices and on the diocesan website at www.dioceseofgaylord.org.

During this season of Advent, a time of waiting and preparation, this weekly series of daily reflections has been created to help us as we await the coming of Christ. In our diocese, we are also waiting and preparing for the appointment of a new bishop. Based on Holy Scriptures and drawing from the five core values highlighted in "Shining Christ's Light: Sunrise to Sunset," these materials may be used for personal or group study.

Service: We imitate the Lord, who came to serve rather than to be served, by pouring ourselves out to meet the spiritual and material needs of our brothers and sisters.

"For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

A deeper awareness of God's generosity to us inevitably produces a sense of appreciation and love that has to be expressed in service. The involvement of our Catholic faithful in parish and community efforts to serve those in need – whether they be poor, homeless, hungry, without required documents, mentally ill, imprisoned, burdened by addiction, unexpectedly pregnant, in abusive relationships, or otherwise in need of help or healing – is admirable. This is another area where Pope Francis has given us great leadership and example and where he is calling us to be even more generous, not just taking care of physical needs but treating those in need as brothers and sisters with great dignity.

The example of service is routinely offered in all of our parishes by the many volunteers who respond to the call to offer their time, talent and treasure for the building up of their parishes. While many volunteer their time on their own as individuals, we surely owe a great debt of gratitude to the various lay groups, such as the St. Vincent DePaul societies, who make

service an important element or purpose of their organization. On the diocesan level, who could deny the contribution made by the Knights of Columbus, the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women and the Daughters of Isabella? The faithful of the diocese, moreover, have had a long tradition of exemplary service in support of expectant mothers and unborn children and there is need to continue to encourage those efforts.

Christian service also continues to be offered in the many ways in which the diocese seeks to work for justice and peace. The diocesan Secretariat for Justice and Peace is well respected throughout our state, particularly in the area of immigrant rights, Comprehensive Immigration Reform and fair trade. The Secretariat's work is primarily focused on emphasizing the dignity of every human person through a Catholic lens by promoting awareness of justice issues at home and around the world, and encouraging political advocacy on the local, state, national, and global levels. As a diocese, we need to collaborate more fully with the Michigan Catholic Conference in the building of a Catholic Legislative Advocacy Network so that the faithful may be informed and engaged in the political process as legislative issues related to the social teaching of the Catholic Church are deliberated on the State level.

We are especially blessed to have Catholic Human Services providing a vast array of services throughout our 21 counties. The agency is highly recognized for their hope-filled social, emotional and spiritual support to all people, regardless of income or faith affiliation, providing mental health, substance abuse, prevention, pregnancy counseling, open adoption, social services and senior services to over 26,000 people per year. Particularly in these times of such economic hardship, we must do all we can to ensure those who need help continue to have access to services close to home.

As a diocese we have particularly benefitted not only from the example of those early religious women and men whose prayers and selfless ministry helped to provide a firm foundation for the Catholic faith in our area, but those who continue that tradition by sharing their gifts with us today. Our permanent deacons remind us of the importance of imitating Christ by emptying ourselves in service through their daily ministry so it is not surprising that their fine service in our diocese would be inspiring more men to discern the call to the diaconate. At the same time, throughout our diocese, faithful lay men and women shine the light of Christ as witnesses of God's love as they volunteer in their parishes and communities to help heal the broken.



Daily Reflections:

Sunday, December 29, 2013 – *The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph*

- **Scripture:** And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:15-17)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “A deeper awareness of God’s generosity to us inevitably produces a sense of appreciation and love that has to be expressed in service.”
- **For Reflection:** Within the family, individuals are nurtured and develop gifts, talents and personalities. How do I encourage my family to be more, to be of service, or to try harder? How does our family promote the gospel messages that are central to Church teachings?

Monday, December 30, 2013 – *6th Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord*

- **Scripture:** Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever. (1 John 2:17)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “The involvement of our Catholic faithful in parish and community efforts to serve those in need – whether they be poor, homeless, hungry, without required documents, mentally ill, imprisoned, burdened by addiction, unexpectedly pregnant, in abusive relationships, or otherwise in need of help or healing – is admirable.”
- **For Reflection:** Those who are weak, vulnerable and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for our society is how we treat those who are the most vulnerable. What more am I called to do when it comes to those in need?

Tuesday, December 31, 2013 – *7th Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord*

- **Scripture:** What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “This is another area where Pope Francis has given us great leadership and example and where he is calling us to be even more generous, not just taking care of physical needs but treating those in need as brothers and sisters with great dignity.”
- **For Reflection:** How do I promote the domestic church and the dignity of life because we recognize God’s call to do so? How does my family?

Wednesday, January 1, 2014 – *Mary, the Holy Mother of God*

- **Scripture:** As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God. (Galatians 4:6-7)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “The example of service is routinely offered in all of our parishes by the many volunteers who respond to the call to offer their time, talent and treasure for the building up of their parishes.”
- **For Reflection:** The U.S. Bishops’ letter on Stewardship says, “As Christian Stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.” Where can my gifts do the most good? Is it parish ministry or larger community service?

Thursday, January 2, 2014 – *Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops and Doctors of the Church*

- **Scripture:** I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, “Make straight the way of the Lord,” as Isaiah the prophet said. (John 1:23)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “The diocesan Secretariat for Justice and Peace is well respected throughout our state, particularly in the area of immigrant rights, Comprehensive Immigration Reform and fair trade.”
- **For Reflection:** How do I go about preparing the way for Justice and Peace among my neighbors, and in my local community? Is there more that I can take part in at the parish or diocesan level?

Friday, January 3, 2014 – *The Most Holy Name of Jesus*

- **Scripture:** See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. (1 John 3:1)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “As a diocese we have particularly benefitted not only from the example of those early religious women and men whose prayers and selfless ministry helped to provide a firm foundation for the Catholic faith in our area, but those who continue that tradition by sharing their gifts with us today.”
- **For Reflection:** Within our parish communities we have all the gifts and talents needed to meet the needs of the faith community. How can I build God’s Kingdom and speak of the Good News with my actions rather than words?

Saturday, January 4, 2014 – *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious*

- **Scripture:** John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day.” (John 1:35-39)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Our permanent deacons remind us of the importance of imitating Christ by emptying ourselves in service through their daily ministry so it is not surprising that their fine service in our diocese would be inspiring more men to discern the call to the diaconate.”
- **For Reflection:** Our faith is a great gift to us and it is through the example and instruction of others that we have come to know and recognize Jesus, the Lamb of God. Who are the people that come to mind as playing a role in forming you in your faith? Why?

Sunday, January 5, 2014 – *The Epiphany of the Lord*

- **Scripture:** Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. (Isaiah 60:3)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “In this time of waiting and preparation for our fifth bishop, we need to prayerfully consider how the Lord is calling us to work towards the building of Christ’s kingdom in the twenty-one counties that constitute the Diocese of Gaylord.”
- **For Reflection:** Am I actively listening for God’s voice in my life? Am I regularly praying for Pope Francis and for the Church in the Diocese of Gaylord? Is my family praying the Diocese of Gaylord’s Prayer for a New Bishop?