

St. Francis and the Leper

St. Francis of Assisi gave up riches in order to embrace poverty and follow Jesus, but he still faced some obstacles along the way. One of them was his fear of lepers.

Leprosy (now known as Hansen's Disease) causes nerve damage and severe skin sores all over a person's body. In the 13th century, when St. Francis lived, there was no treatment or cure. The sight of lepers revolted St. Francis, noted Murray Bodo, O.F.M., at *Franciscan Media*.

One day, while riding his horse, St. Francis was approached by a leper. Despite his misgivings, the saint embraced the man and gave him money. After getting back on his horse, St. Francis couldn't see the leper anywhere. He came to believe the leper was Jesus in disguise.

From that moment on, St. Francis found "spiritual and physical consolation" in the company of lepers. In his work *My Testament*, he instructed his friars to "be glad to live among social outcasts, among the poor and helpless, the sick and the lepers, and those who beg by the wayside."

I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. (Ezekiel 34:16)

Give me compassion for those rejected by society, Jesus.

The Sign of Our Love for God

Born in Italy in 1894, Mother Thecla Merlo went on to cofound the Daughters of St. Paul with Father James Alberione. Their goal was to use media to evangelize, a mission which expanded as print, radio, film, and television evolved.

Though Mother Thecla experienced some health problems, she never let them affect her work. Father Alberione said of her, “In various everyday instances, whether pleasant or not, her outlook and manner of speaking flowed from her love for God, to whom she abandoned herself completely and absolutely.”

In fact, love for all souls remained her chief motivation. These words from Mother Thecla can serve as a good reminder to us all: “The sign of our love for God is the love of our neighbor. It’s easy to love those who are far away. We must love all the people in the world, pray that all may be saved. But then we must love and treat well those closer to us. This is what’s more difficult.”

Let us love one another, because love is from God. (1 John 4:7)

Father, teach me to offer Your life-affirming love to all those around me.

Heroic Sergeant Becomes an Uncle

Sergeant David Musgrove from Florida's Charlotte County Sheriff's Office was on patrol one night when a motorcycle zoomed past his car. Soon after, he heard a loud crash and rushed to the scene.

As reported by Katie Kindelan for *Good Morning America*, the motorcyclist, traveling at 90 mph, had crashed into a car which held single mom Kayleigh Foley, her three-year-old daughter Ariel, and six-month-old infant Lola. The driver of the motorcycle died immediately, but Kayleigh screamed for help for her family.

Though Kayleigh and Ariel suffered only minor injuries, Sgt. Musgrove couldn't find a pulse on Lola, so he started CPR on the side of the road. Just as paramedics arrived, Lola gasped and took a breath. Sgt. Musgrove had saved her life.

Though Lola still faces a long road of recovery, her family is grateful she is alive. "He's our angel, that's for sure," Lola's grandmother, Lisa, said. And the Foleys have now unofficially adopted Sgt. Musgrove as an "uncle."

Rescue the weak and the needy. (Psalm 82:4)

Guide and protect police officers who do their best to save lives, Jesus.

Café Brings Worshipers Together

As rector of Baltimore's Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Father Brendan Fitzgerald often sees homeless people come into the church for shelter from the heat or cold. Sadly, they leave after a few hours, without anyone engaging them in conversation about their lives or faith. With the opening of Sexton's Lodge Café, however, Father Fitzgerald hopes this will change.

As reported by George P. Matysek Jr. in the *Catholic Review*, "The new café, erected inside a structure built north of the cathedral in 1840, is meant to be a place where basilica parishioners can develop relationships with people who live on the streets." It offers free refreshments after two weekly Masses.

Father Fitzgerald observed, "It's good for families to see the poor and to encounter the poor and to love the poor before they head back to the suburbs. I think it's a beautiful witness to see some of the poor genuinely worship with us on Sundays. We have some who have been baptized, and they participate in the liturgy."

The righteous know...the poor. (Proverbs 29:7)

Lord, may we seek to know and uplift the poor.

An Antidote to Loneliness

Loneliness and isolation have become an epidemic in the United States. The solution, however, could lie right in your own neighborhood: volunteering.

Writing for *America* magazine, Catholic Charities USA President and CEO Kerry Alys Robinson observed, “Volunteering nourishes the soul. As we grapple with fragmentation, political polarization, and rising distrust in institutions, a national embrace of volunteerism could go a long way toward healing what ails us as a society.”

Robinson knows whereof she speaks. Catholic Charities relies on 45,000 staff members and 215,000 volunteers to accomplish all they do. She said, “Generosity is humankind’s birthright, and volunteer work allows us to be generous with our most valuable assets: our time and attention.

“Central to Christianity is a disposition of other-centeredness...All the volunteers I encounter say to me that, paradoxically, they are the true beneficiaries of their encounters with others in merciful service.”

Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Peter 4:10)

*Increase my desire to be of service to others,
Lord.*

Motel to Home

Though she had a job, Tracy Neal didn't earn enough money to afford an apartment for herself and her two children. So, like thousands of other Georgia residents, she opted to live in an extended-stay motel.

After two years, Neal found new hope through her local St. Vincent de Paul Society's Motel to Home initiative, which provides "support and resources to help families transition into secure, long-term housing," reported the *Georgia Bulletin*. The assistance allowed Neal to move into a townhome.

To qualify for Motel to Home, "applicants must have a steady income and children." Once accepted, they receive financial assistance, but must also cooperate with caseworkers on budgeting, credit score improvement, and goal setting.

Neal credited these budgeting lessons with teaching her to become more financially responsible. Now serving as a mentor to other participants, she concluded, "Motel to Home isn't just an organization that throws money at people. They're really saving lives because they literally saved mine."

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. (Proverbs 21:5)

God, show us the means to better our lives.

Teaching Children to Be Generous

Who helps a child learn how to give, how to sidestep selfish behavior? According to Victor Parachin in *Catholic Digest*, “parents still have the greatest opportunity to provide moral formation.” How do children develop caring and sharing attitudes? He suggests the following:

- Start early. Even a one-year-old has generous instincts.
- Love and nurture your children, and shower them with respect.
- Be a role model. Practice what you preach about generosity and giving.
- Make holidays a time to give and receive, especially to those in need.
- Create opportunities for sharing and caring. Actively give help, consolation, or support to others. Write a letter, give flowers, or donate supplies when such gestures are called for—and encourage your children to do the same.
- Commend your children for acts of caring and kindness.
- Promote tolerance and acceptance. Let your children know that differences are acceptable.

**Let us conduct ourselves becomingly.
(Romans 13:13)**

Jesus, help us set good examples for children.

When You Love People

Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker movement and embraced poverty herself while living among, and serving those, who were poor and hungry. She also shared much wisdom in her books. John Touhey, writing at *Aleteia*, shared some of her memorable quotes.

In her 1948 book *On Pilgrimage*, Day noted, “Whenever I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife which may at any moment become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself, ‘What else is the world interested in?’ What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships. God is Love. Love casts out fear.”

Continuing with the theme of love, Day added, “When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, and nothing else, and love them. There can never be enough of it.”

**If we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us.
(1 John 4:12)**

Jesus, help me see Your loving presence in all I meet.

The Baking Benedictines

It's not surprising that the Benedictine nuns at Transfiguration Hermitage in Windsor, Maine, are devoted to prayer. What is unusual is how committed they also are to baking fruit and rum cakes, and selling them during the Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas seasons to support themselves.

As reported by Dan McQuillan in *The Rhode Island Catholic*, Sister Elizabeth, Sister Bernadette, and Sister Anastasia try to incorporate prayer and an awareness of God's presence into everything they do, including their hours spent in the kitchen. They focus on fruit and rum cakes, Sister Elizabeth explained, because "they ship and keep well. We start making them in January and finish our production sometime in May."

The Sisters also welcome the occasional visitors to their small retreat house. Sister Elizabeth noted, "A few people join us for communal prayers. Most, though, just need quiet and nothing to do." Regarding prayer in general, she added, "Don't worry about how you're praying. Just quiet down. See what surfaces and talk to God about that. That's all people need, really."

**Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.
(Colossians 3:17)**

*Teach me to see Your presence in all I do,
Creator.*

War Horses for Veterans

Eight years after Iraq War veteran Patrick Benson retired from the military, he found himself experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress. His chosen career of training horses became a healing lifeline for him—and he realized that it could play the same role for other veterans who were struggling.

Benson co-founded the program War Horses for Veterans (WHFV) on a 30-acre horse ranch in Stilwell, Kansas. Donations from individuals and corporations cover workshops and multi-day sessions with horses for veterans and first responders, allowing them to reconnect with their talents, families, workplaces, and communities in new ways, reported *Costco Connection* magazine. One Iraq War veteran credited the program with saving his life.

“Horses are great teachers,” Benson explained. “You can’t fool them. They will humble you, if that’s what you need, but they can build you up, too. We see amazing transformations here.”

**Ask the animals and they will teach you.
(Job 12:7)**

Guide those experiencing trauma towards healing, Divine Physician.

Army Veteran Saves a Life

When Army veteran Juan Serrano left a church community event in Petersburg, Virginia, little did he expect to do God's will by saving a person's life.

Serrano and his wife were driving home when they spotted a young man walking along the edge of a bridge that crossed the Appomattox River. Serrano felt something was wrong, so he stepped out of the car and called out to the young man to see if he needed help. Then, the unimaginable happened—the young man jumped off the bridge!

Picturing the troubled man as one of his kids, Serrano told *WTVR* that he was determined to rescue him. His training came back in full force, and Serrano jumped into the cold water, grabbed the man, and they travelled about a mile down the river, ultimately landing at the gates of a water treatment plant when help arrived.

Serrano is sharing his story to help spread the need for more mental health resources in all communities. "Hero is a big word," he said. "I was just a guy with my wife, passing by, and God put us there for a reason."

He might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. (Genesis 37:22)

Merciful Jesus, bless all kind and caring veterans.

The Hero of the Video

Last year, 28-year-old Tik Tok influencer Jimmy Darts released a video that conveyed just how much one kind gesture can impact the lives of many. The film starts with the California native approaching 75-year-old Linda Witt-King in a Costa Mesa library. When Darts asks her for something to eat, Witt-King gives him most of the food she has.

The footage then goes on to witness Linda's shocked and tearful reaction when Jimmy gifts her with \$1,000, telling her he was just "helping out the first person who helped" him. When Witt-King told Darts that because of his generosity, she would be able to stay in a motel that night, the young man was amazed to learn that his benefactor was homeless herself, having given up everything she had to help those in need.

According to *Newsweek*, Witt-King's inspiring story got over "7.2 million views." The next day, Jimmy was thrilled to be able to tell his new friend, whom he declared the "hero of the video," that \$32,000 had been raised for her through a GoFundMe page. "I have been blessed, this time in a major way," Linda told *ABC 7*. "My life has completely changed."

Do good...share what you have. (Hebrews 13:16)

Jesus, infuse us with generous and loving spirits.

Sister's Road to Bread and Life, Part 1

Sister Caroline Tweedy, RSM, grew up thinking that coaching sports would be her dream job. Life didn't exactly turn out that way for the Sister of Mercy, who now serves as Executive Director of the St. John's Bread and Life food pantry program in Brooklyn, New York.

When Sister Caroline was a child, she helped out in the restaurant/bakery that her grandmother owned. "At the end of the day, my grandmother would give whatever was left to whoever was there, whoever needed it," she recalled during a *Christopher Closeup* interview. "She never turned anybody away."

The Catholic faith that Sister Caroline saw modeled by her family also left a lasting impression. She noted, "We were always taught that God is loving and compassionate, and God forgives, and that as a Christian, your mission in life is to do good. Whatever road that takes you down, everybody has something to offer. Everyone. That stuck in my mind the most. You're part of a group, but you're also your own person, and you have to give back."

The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Teach me to share what I have with others in need, Savior.

Sister's Road to Bread and Life, Part 2

Young Caroline Tweedy went on to attend a Mercy High School, run by the Sisters of Mercy, who impressed her with the joy with which they served. But the thought of joining them herself was still far in the future. Instead, she excelled in athletics, which resulted in her getting college scholarships that allowed her to earn a degree in comparative literature in history.

After graduating, however, Tweedy was offered a job teaching physical education at her old high school. The work involved coaching, so she felt drawn to it: "I saw people who gave back and how happy they were and the fruits of that: to train the next generation to be good sports, and to understand what their faith is and how to share their faith with one another. That was really important to me."

When someone asked Tweedy if she considered joining the Sisters of Mercy, she replied, "Oh, no, I've got other fish to fry." Eventually, the other fish got fried, and Tweedy found herself attracted to the Sisters of Mercy's mission and work—and the idea of living in community.

Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Peter 4:10)

Reveal Your divine purpose within me, Holy Spirit.

Sister's Road to Bread and Life, Part 3

After joining the Sisters of Mercy, Sister Caroline Tweedy went on to hold various jobs at Mercy Home for Children, which cares for developmentally disabled children and adults, both in residential programs and in respite care programs. It was a life-changing experience that allowed her to see the world through God's eyes.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Sister Caroline said, "You see the face of God in those that are most fragile, those who don't have a voice. You become their voice. You take a stand for them...There are people whose voices are not heard, people who are undercounted or undervalued, and that shouldn't be. We're all equal, and we all have something to contribute. Because someone has a disability doesn't mean they can't do the job. It just might take them a little longer."

That experience proved to be the perfect foundation for Sister Caroline's current work at the St. John's Bread and Life food pantry program.

**Speak out for those who cannot speak...defend
the rights of the poor and needy.
(Proverbs 31:8-9)**

*Make our society more welcoming to those who
live with disabilities, Father.*

Sister's Road to Bread and Life, Part 4

St. John's Bread and Life in Brooklyn, New York, provides four and a half million meals to food insecure people each year through its soup kitchen and food pantry programs. As Executive Director, Sister Caroline Tweedy, RSM, oversees every detail.

When we refer to “the poor” or “the homeless,” we can depersonalize these groups of people. But Sister Caroline and her team are meeting them face-to-face as children of God. She explained, “You are putting a face on someone who is in need of a service, who might be in crisis. And when you look at that person, you see the face of God...That’s really what we’re doing.

“You can learn about...religious life and service in the Church by reading it or watching somebody else. But until you actually have that interaction with folks, and you see progress, that’s when you’ve made a significant difference. For all of us, it’s very important to have that one-to-one relationship. We could walk through the neighborhood, and everybody knows who [we] are.”

**I was hungry and you gave Me food...I was a stranger and you welcomed Me.
(Matthew 25:35)**

Help me to see Your face in other people, Jesus.

Sister's Road to Bread and Life, Part 5

Out of St. John's Bread and Life's 35 staff members, 10 are former clients who were able to get back on their feet with the assistance of the program, which also includes counseling on government benefits that can help those struggling through a hard time. And food for the soul is always available to the guests through compassionate interactions with the staff.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Sister Caroline Tweedy concluded, "For me personally, the greatest gift is to know that you've helped someone...That person may come one time or that person may come multiple times, and you see their success. You'll get a letter from the city or the state or an agency that we've worked with that says, 'So-and-so is now housed,' or, 'So-and-so no longer needs SNAP benefits. They have a job.'

"Those are the things that are exciting for us. Sometimes we see the fruits of our labor, and sometimes we just have to hope for the best. You can get a little jaded sometimes, but certainly the joy outweighs the jadedness multiple times."

**There will never cease to be some in need...I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."
(Deuteronomy 15:11)**

*Allow me the blessing of helping someone,
Messiah.*

St. Lucy's Gift Giveaway

For 22 years, St. Lucy's Church, located in Syracuse, New York, has orchestrated an annual "gift giveaway" for Christmas. The inventory for this drive has grown so much that a warehouse is needed to store all the presents.

In 2023, all the donated gifts, worth approximately \$15,000, were stolen. The community's reaction was nothing short of inspirational. There were no "negative" responses, recalled co-coordinator of this event, Kay Scharoun, in *The Catholic Sun*, only "a cast of 1000s," ready and willing to help!

By the beginning of December, 2,000 replacement items had been bought and dropped off at the church's gym, ready to be organized and delivered to 230 local families in need. When asked what message Kay would share with the robbers, she had these uplifting words to say:

"If you have needs that are so great that you're tempted to steal, come to us; we have a clothing room...a food pantry...Let me help you. Let me help you out of the situation that you feel is so desperate that you have to steal."

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)

Jesus, help us to be messengers of peace and goodwill.

The Best Medicine

Though hospice physician Dr. Christopher Kerr is not a religious man, he respects the faith of his patients and does whatever he can to accommodate their wishes. As Paul Lauritzen notes in a profile of Dr. Kerr in *Commonweal*, he once had a 56-year-old Catholic patient, Ann Gadanyi. She entered hospice around Thanksgiving because she was dying of breast cancer.

With Christmas approaching, she told Dr. Kerr that her one wish was to “attend Christmas Eve Mass to hear her daughter sing, and wake on Christmas morning at home.”

“Kerr explained that this plan would be difficult,” Lauritzen wrote, “because Ann was receiving medication through IV lines...Without the IVs, pain and bleeding could be serious problems. However, he told her, if she had her heart set on this plan, they could probably make it happen.”

And make it happen he did! In gratitude, Ann called the local newspaper, asking them to do a story on Dr. Kerr. When a reporter asked him why he went out of his way to help Ann, Dr. Kerr responded, “Sometimes the best medicine is not medicine.”

Honor physicians for their services, for the Lord created them. (Sirach 38:1)

God, may we remember there is more than one way to heal.

‘Postboxes to Heaven’ Installed Across UK

Ten-year-old Matilda Handy from the United Kingdom wished to send her deceased grandparents a Christmas card and say how much she still loved them. It was then that she had the idea for a postbox to heaven, and to have it available to people to help them with the grieving process around the holidays.

Matilda, along with her mother, Leanne, approached Gedling Crematorium in Nottingham in 2022 with the postbox idea. The crematorium agreed and erected an old postbox, painting it white and gold just in time for Christmas. The response was overwhelming, with more than 100 letters dropped.

The “Letters to Heaven” box was rolled out across 40 sites in England, Scotland, and Wales. It became a way of helping relatives who were grieving their lost loved ones on anniversaries and holidays. Leanne told *Good News Network*:

“A lot of people miss sending cards at Christmas time, and they find real comfort in sending something, whether it’s a child drawing a picture or an older person sending something to their loved ones...It helps with the process.”

This is my comfort in my distress, that Your promise gives me life. (Psalm 119:50)

Loving Lord, comfort me in my time of grief.

Finding God in Mongolia, Part 1

When Father Peter Turrone of the Archdiocese of Toronto, Canada, became a priest, he embarked on a unique missionary experience. He traveled to Mongolia in central Asia and set up a church in a tentlike structure called a “ger” or “yurt.” This church was named Mother of Mercy, and it remains there today.

Outside of the city, Father Turrone was surrounded by grasslands and desert, leaving him in awe of the country’s beauty. In an *Aleteia* profile, John Burger wrote, “A hermit priest [that Father Turrone] met there told him not to be surprised if he someday realizes that God led him to Mongolia so that ‘He could first evangelize *you*.’”

With only 1,500 Catholics in the entire country, Father Turrone’s ministry started out small. But people soon came to pitch their own yurts, to be used as their homes, around the church in order to be close to it. The priest discovered that despite their poverty, the people of Mongolia possess a “spiritual richness” the Western world could learn from.

More tomorrow...

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news. (Mark 16:15)

*Guide me in developing a “spiritual richness,”
Paraclete.*

Finding God in Mongolia, Part 2

In light of his missionary work in Mongolia, Father Peter Turrone couldn't help but think of the line from John's gospel, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." The proper translation of that line from Greek, the priest had learned, stated "pitched His tent among us." This connected perfectly to a church in a tent surrounded by people's tented residences.

During a Christmas Eve service, Father Turrone preached, "God has pitched His tent among us. What is also incredible is the way in which He chose to do so. Jesus could have chosen to be born in a grand palace with a bed made out of the finest linens and precious metals...But He didn't. He chose to lie in the same place where animals came to eat."

In an *Aleteia* profile, Father Turrone recalled that several shepherds he had never seen before came into Mass that night to get out of the cold. They seemed "curious" and examined the Nativity scene. Father Turrone found it spiritually profound to be around shepherds, like those in Bethlehem, at this special service. He called it "one of the most moving experiences of my life as a priest."

**Shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.
(Ezekiel 34:7)**

Thank You for "pitching Your tent" among us, Jesus.

The Dog that Saved Christmas

It was the week before Christmas 2023, and Philadelphia resident Chanell Bell could not believe what her husky, Kobe, had dug up in her front yard: a gas leak.

Since Bell had experienced a recent gas leak in her home, she got a gas level reader to further investigate. The reader didn't indicate anything harmful, but when Kobe persisted in digging in that same area a few days later, Chanell pulled out her reader again. This time, "it detected the presence of gas."

As she was told by the repairmen, who worked three days to fix the leak, if left unchecked for much longer, Chanell's home could have blown up and endangered the rest of her block as well. "[It] was really, really mind-blowing," Chanell exclaimed, as quoted in *The Guardian*. "I'm so thankful for God, thankful for...[Kobe]."

At the suggestion of an inspired viewer of her shared video on digital media, Bell chronicled the story of Kobe's life-saving sense of smell in her 2024 independently published children's book, *The Dog that Saved the Block Before Christmas*. What a fitting tribute to an extremely good boy!

**Who teaches us more than the animals?
(Job 35:11)**

Abba, bless our pets, healers and guardians of us all.

One Volunteer's Courageous Choice

Grazyna Slawinska of Krakow, Poland, already had a heart for the disabled. The 33-year-old's job consisted of teaching university students how to work with people who have disabilities. She never expected, however, to become a person with a disability herself.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Slawinska knew that she had a personal calling to help Ukrainians with disabilities. "War is challenging for a healthy person, it is a nightmare for a disabled one," she told *OSV News*. Ukraine lacks accessible infrastructure for the disabled, and many cannot physically descend to bomb shelters for safety.

That Christmas, Slawinska was volunteering in the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut to bring the disabled food and a sense of normalcy. It was there that tragedy struck. She had to have her right leg amputated after it was hit by a Russian mortar shell.

Following months of recuperation, Slawinska bravely returned to Ukraine for Christmas 2023, saying, "I went to Ukraine because my heart told me I must go."

**It is more blessed to give than to receive.
(Acts 20:35)**

Jesus, bless all the volunteers who are working to help those most vulnerable during times of war.

A Happy Accident for Thanksgiving

In 2016, Wanda Dench of Mesa, Arizona, thought she was texting her grandson and inviting him to Thanksgiving dinner. But her grandson had changed his number, so the text instead went to 17-year-old stranger, Jamal Hinton.

He explained the error to Dench, but also asked if he could come over anyway. Dench told Hinton, “Of course you can. That’s what grandmas do...feed everyone.”

That began a new tradition, with Hinton joining Dench for Thanksgiving for eight years and counting. The bond between the two became even more important after Dench’s husband died and she needed the support of family and friends.

The experience inspired Dench to open her home to more strangers who longed for a homemade Thanksgiving meal and a friendly environment. Both Dench and Hinton feel they’ve benefited from their accidental friendship. Dench told *Arizona’s Family*, “I’ve changed my view so much on the younger generation...I didn’t change their life; they changed mine.”

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels.
(Hebrews 13:2)**

*Teach us, Jesus, the value of gratitude and
friendship.*

Reasons for Gratitude

As Thanksgiving Day approached, Father Peter John Cameron, O.P., found himself reflecting on reasons for gratitude. Writing at *Aleteia*, he explained that the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink are all provided by God, so it is natural to express our thanks to Him.

We also give thanks to “create communion” with other people, Father Peter said: “The thanks we give acknowledge how much we rely on others for our well-being. The more thankful we are, the more we belong to each other.”

The words of St. Bernard also offer insight: “Happy the person who gives thanks from the bottom of their heart, even for the least blessings, regarding everything they receive as a purely gratuitous gift.”

And the late theologian and minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was murdered by the Nazis, offered this piece of wisdom on finding meaning in our lives: “In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”

**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
(2 Corinthians 9:15)**

*Teach me to be appreciative of the gift of life,
Creator.*

The Root of Gratitude

“To be happy is to be grateful.” So writes the Editorial Board of *Our Sunday Visitor* in a Thanksgiving reflection. And surely, as we take stock of the blessings in our lives, we know that statement is true. When we appreciate what each day brings—and what we already have—we find ourselves happier.

Our perspective on thankfulness, however, can always be broadened. As OSV further observes, “In the hustle and bustle of life, it’s easy to overlook the many small miracles and blessings surrounding us. We should strive to continually offer thanks, not only when the sun shines but even—especially—when the storms gather, for it is in those moments that gratitude truly becomes an act of faith. Gratitude is the pathway to a life lived in awareness of God’s boundless love and grace, where each day is an opportunity to say, “Thank You, Lord, for the gift of life and for the privilege of sharing it with those we hold dear.””

If you know anyone who is enduring loneliness or hardship this holiday season, consider being a blessing to them and giving them a reason to be grateful themselves.

**Give thanks in all circumstances.
(1 Thessalonians 5:18)**

Help me see my life through the eyes of gratitude, Savior.

Advent of Kindness

In addition to buying Advent calendars that include little pieces of chocolate behind each window, some people are using “Advent of Kindness” calendars, which offer suggestions for each day of December. Here are a few ideas:

- While waiting on line in a store, allow someone to go in front of you.
- Get in touch with an old friend or relative whom you’ve lost contact with. If you had a disagreement with that person, try your best to make peace.
- Write a thank you note to someone. Express gratitude to anyone who helps you in the course of your day.
- Bake Christmas cookies for a neighbor or offer to help put up a few decorations if they’re unable to do so themselves.
- Give a meal to someone who is hungry. Donate some clothes that you no longer wear—and that are in good condition—to a local organization that helps the less fortunate.
- Pray—and work—to be more like Jesus, serving others with love.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:16)

Teach me to be a role model of kindness, Savior.

Welcome Christ in Prayer and Song

Though it's been nearly 20 years since she was a freshman at New York's Fordham University, Jen Sawyer always attends the school's annual Festival of Lessons and Carols, held at St. Paul the Apostle Church on the first Saturday of December. This tradition remains a highlight of her Advent.

Writing at *Jesuits.org*, Sawyer describes a scene in which a female soloist, holding a single candle in the darkened church, begins singing, "Once in royal David's city/Stood a lowly cattle shed,/Where a mother laid her baby/In a manger for His bed:/Mary was that mother mild,/Jesus Christ her little child."

The rest of the choir then joins in, "as the flame from the single candle is passed from choir member to choir member until the once-dark church is fully illuminated by candlelight."

This experience has resonated with Sawyer since the first time she attended the festival. She wrote, "I listened attentively to the scriptural lessons and reflections, sang my heart out with my friends, and realized I was part of a community coming together in prayer and song to welcome Christ into our hearts."

They kindled a fire and welcomed all of us around it. (Acts 28:2)

Fill my Advent with prayer, song, and community, Jesus.

The Peace Light

Every Advent, a special package arrives at Kennedy Airport in New York: the Peace Light. As reported by *The Tablet's* Alicia Venter, the Peace Light is “a continuous flame originating in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where for more than 1,000 years oil lamps have continuously burned.”

Brought from Vienna, Austria, by a group called the Messengers of Peace, a small ceremony, sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America, was held at the airport's Our Lady of the Skies Chapel in 2023.

“A gathering of faithful,” Venter explained, “surrounded the flame and prayed for peace across the world—particularly in the war-torn Holy Land—before lighting their own lanterns with fire from the Peace Light flame, which is symbolic of universal peace, harmony and unity.”

The irony of the Peace Light coming from the war-ravaged Middle East was not lost on attendees. Still, volunteers planned to drive the flame to different places across North America to spread the message of the Prince of Peace.

Give light to those who sit in darkness...guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:79)

*Help us to choose peace over hatred and strife,
Father.*