

A Pilgrimage for Prisoners

Many prisoners hope to follow the metaphorical road to rehabilitation and redemption. But for 110 inmates from 15 prisons in Spain, the road they followed was altogether real.

As reported by the website *Aleteia*, the Department of Prison Pastoral Care of the Spanish Bishops' Conference arranged for prisoners to embark on a one-week pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago (aka, "Way of St. James"), accompanied by 100 officials, chaplains, and volunteers.

The goal was to give the inmates a spiritual experience which also offered them some freedom and responsibility. Thankfully, they rose to the occasion. A prisoner named Darly observed, "We felt valued. We were able to forgive each other and leave behind the negative things in life." Gustavo, another inmate, added that the pilgrimage was "an opportunity to redeem ourselves, to forgive ourselves."

The pilgrimage ended when everyone arrived at the Santiago de Compostela cathedral, where priests celebrated a Mass during which all the participants felt a renewed sense of hope and God's love.

Bring me out of prison, so that I may give thanks to Your name. (Psalm 142:7)

Guide prisoners toward redemption, Merciful Savior.

Centenarian Finds Purpose in Volunteering

Most people would complain about a four-hour commute, especially when facing the unpredictable weather in Edinburgh, Scotland. But David Flucker isn't most people. He spends 12 hours a week commuting to and from the charity shop where he works—and he's 100 years old!

David started working at St. Columba's Hospice Shop a few years ago after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. The hospice cared for him for two weeks, and when he was released, he decided to repay them for their kindness.

The Scotsman enjoys working at the shop three days a week, even though it's a four-hour round trip to his home. He also enjoys checking the donations to ensure they are good. "It's a wonderful feeling to be doing something," he told *Good News Network*.

What David loves most about his job are the people he interacts with. Some even "come in just to chat." It's the best part of David's day—giving back to others. That makes the commute nothing more than a journey to live a purposeful life.

**The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me.
(Psalm 138:8)**

God, may I seek to live a purposeful life.

The Reciprocity Effect

No matter how much you achieve in life, you should never forget where you come from—or the people who helped you find success. Maryland native and recent Harvard Law School graduate Rehan Staton follows this belief. Coming from a family of sanitation workers—and having worked as one himself—Staton knows what it’s like to struggle just to make ends meet.

According to *The Harvard Gazette*, Rehan never would have gotten into Harvard without the sacrifices and help of his family, not to mention Tyler Perry, the famed actor/director who heard his story and offered to pay for his law school tuition. “No one does it alone,” Staton noted in *The New York Post*. “Just keep paying it forward.”

To that end, Staton and his former boss, Brent Bates, established The Reciprocity Effect, with the intent of recognizing and assisting the “unsung heroes” of the everyday working world. They began by hosting a banquet honoring 30 members of the sanitation staff at Harvard, whose efforts were often ignored by students. One year and \$70,000 later, this organization is still going strong.

**Outdo one another in showing honor.
(Romans 12:10)**

Lord, may the golden rule guide my life.

How to Help Kids Decrease Screen Time

Phone and tablet screens have become a part of our kids' daily lives. However, screens can have a damaging effect, with some studies claiming they are cultivating distracted, grumpy, and argumentative little people.

One family, the DeFranks, took this dilemma into their own hands and instituted a “30-day screen detox.” On her blog *MollyDeFrank.com*, mother of five Molly DeFrank recommends five steps to help detox your family from screen time:

- Cut out screens completely for 30 days.
- Go to the library, and let kids find a stack of books.
- Compile a list of free play options.
- Observe your kids and which activities they enjoy most.
- Make a long-term plan that works best for your family.

DeFrank saw positive results. She concluded, “Technology can, of course, be useful—in its right place. The key is making technology work for us, rather than the other way around.”

**Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.
(Ephesians 4:23)**

Jesus, help me to avoid distractions in my life.

Still the Best Policy

Many years ago, it took one man in Birmingham, Alabama, more than a year to give back to the government money he said didn't belong to him.

Robert Harwell was granted Social Security disability payments following a nervous breakdown. He was able to return to work sooner than expected, but Social Security kept sending him checks every month, despite his efforts to get the bureaucracy to stop. Eventually, \$19,000 came his way.

Harwell put it all in the bank. He said he gave the money back because he didn't want to be found out later and lose his benefits when he became a senior citizen. Social Security accepted the funds back, eventually.

Honesty is the best policy, even if one's motive is self-interest. Others may give you a hard time for refusing to take what doesn't belong to you. But there is satisfaction in knowing that you are doing what is right.

Let us live honorably. (Romans 13:13)

God, help me to be a person of integrity.

Café Boosts Confidence

Hackettstown High School in New Jersey has a café that serves up much more than coffee. A student-created business helps its special education students move ahead on their road to adult independence.

In the morning, participants sell coffee to staff. In the afternoon, they work in local businesses which will offer them jobs after graduation.

“I’ve learned different job skills, money skills, interacting with customers,” one coffee shop participant told *CBS News*.

Principal Kyle Sosnovik explained, “We identify students that may need some support socially,” and then “build the program that gives them structured learning experiences here in the school and then outside in the community.”

A teacher noticed how the youngsters “really gained confidence” by creating and running a business.

Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all. (Galatians 6:10)

May we give youngsters the nourishment they need to grow into contributing adults, Jesus.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 1

Carl Erskine may not be a household name, but he deserves to be. He was New York baseball royalty during the 1940s and 50s, helping the Brooklyn Dodgers win their only World Series in 1955 against their crosstown rivals, the Yankees. But as great a pitcher as he was, Carl's legacy far exceeds anything he accomplished on the field.

Long before the word "inclusion" became a mainstay in our national conversations, Carl modeled an attitude of openness and welcoming to others who were different from him. He did this during his childhood, as a teammate of Jackie Robinson, and as the father of a child with Down syndrome in an era when special needs children were often institutionalized.

In fact, Carl served as a pioneer in helping those with intellectual and physical challenges better integrate into their families and communities. His story is now being told in the Christopher Award-winning documentary *The Best We've Got*. Filmmaker Ted Green joined us recently on *Christopher Closeup* to discuss Carl's remarkable life. More tomorrow...

**Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
(Matthew 6:20)**

Help me to walk in Your ways of love, Jesus.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 2

Carl Erskine's earliest memory was visiting the site of a lynching. He was four years old in 1930 when his father took him to Marion, Indiana, to see the aftermath of what had happened the day before. The elder Erskine's goal was to demonstrate to his son that this was "hate at its worst."

Thankfully, Carl's parents lived their Christian faith in a way that was courageously enlightened for the times. They taught him to love God and love his neighbor—and they included people of all colors in their definition of "neighbor."

A defining incident occurred when Carl was 10 years old. He was playing buckets in his neighborhood one day when Johnny Wilson, a nine-year-old African American child, saw him and watched shyly from the side. Carl walked up to Johnny, held his ball out, and asked, "Do you want to play?"

That simple action flew in the face of the prevailing worldview that white and black kids should stay apart. Carl and Johnny became great friends, and Johnny was welcomed into the Erskine's home many times. More tomorrow...

**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
(Matthew 19:19)**

May I see all people as my neighbor, Christ.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 3

In 1948, Carl Erskine became a pitcher with the Brooklyn Dodgers and a teammate of Jackie Robinson, who had broken Major League Baseball's color barrier just one year earlier. Robinson faced racism from many people, but he and Carl became fast friends. In fact, Jackie was amazed at how easily Carl accepted him and his family.

For instance, one day, Carl walked over to a section of Ebbets Field that was fenced off for the players' families. Fans were reaching through the fence to get autographs. Carl noticed Jackie's wife, Rachel, and young son, Jackie Jr., standing alone with nobody talking to them, so he approached them and made them feel welcome. The next day, Jackie thanked Carl for going out of his way to make Rachel and Jackie Jr. feel accepted. Carl responded that it was the most natural thing in the world for him.

Ted Green, the filmmaker behind the Christopher Award-winning documentary *The Best We've Got: The Carl Erskine Story*, said, "Carl shows how easy it can be if you put decency first, if you put others before you." More tomorrow...

Look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:4)

May I be a friendly presence to the marginalized, Jesus.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 4

Carl Erskine also had a major impact on children with special needs, an impact whose ripple effects are still being felt today. On April 1, 1960, Carl's wife Betty gave birth to their son Jimmy, who had Down syndrome. This was not a welcoming era for people with intellectual challenges.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his Erskine documentary *The Best We've Got*, Ted Green explained that people with special needs were viewed as pulling society down. That attitude led to the eugenics movement, which said people with intellectual disabilities "need to be eliminated or not allowed to have children."

In 1907, Erskine's home state of Indiana passed the country's first compulsory sterilization law for people with intellectual disabilities. Other states soon followed suit. The eugenics movement in the U.S. finally lost steam during World War II because it was similar to what the Nazis were doing. That's when institutionalizing children with special needs became popular. But the Erskines chose a different path. More tomorrow...

**Speak out for those who cannot speak.
(Proverbs 31:8)**

Help us fight injustice with kindness, Savior.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 5

Carl and Betty Erskine resisted the prejudice against special needs children during the 1950s and 60s. When Betty's doctor suggested that their son Jimmy, who was born with Down syndrome, be sent to an institution, she responded, "No way. I've been carrying this guy for nine months, and he's coming home with me."

Carl and Betty were not the first to make this choice. They became part of what was called "The Parents' Movement," in which moms and dads raised their own disabled children, emphasizing that the best treatment for them is love and respect.

The Erskines, however, took it one step further. Ted Green, who earned a Christopher Award for his documentary *The Best We've Got: The Carl Erskine Story*, explained that not only did the couple bring Jimmy home, they refused to hide him at home, which was the norm for people who couldn't afford institutions.

Instead, they took him everywhere and started setting up play dates in churches and the community for other children with special needs. The idea spread and thrived. More tomorrow...

Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me. (Matthew 18:5)

*May I be welcoming to all with special needs,
Creator.*

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 6

When Jimmy Erskine was born with Down syndrome in 1960, doctors predicted he would only live to age 30 or 35. Well, Jimmy turned 63 in 2023. He worked at Applebee's for 20 years, competed in Special Olympics for 50 years, and has even moved out of his parents' home to live by himself (with some outside assistance). He is living a rich and full life, thanks to his parents.

Both Special Olympics of Indiana and The Arc of Indiana cite Carl and Betty Erskine as being at the epicenter of improving inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental challenges in their state.

In addition, the Erskine Green Training Institute, which offers job training to people with intellectual challenges, has an 80 percent placement rate, compared to the standard 20 percent elsewhere.

The key is that Carl Erskine used his fame as a Brooklyn Dodgers' star and World Series champion not to build up his own ego, but to improve the lives of others. And now those efforts are spreading to a new generation. More tomorrow...

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

Lord, may we use our influence to improve life for others.

Baseball Great's Faith-Driven Decency, Part 7

Because of his background modeling racial inclusion and an embrace of children with special needs, Carl Erskine's life is being shared with a new generation. Christopher Award-winning filmmaker Ted Green and Special Olympics Indiana are promoting an educational initiative called EPIC (the Erskine Personal Impact Curriculum).

The project uses a shortened version of *The Best We've Got* documentary, as well as different age level books about Carl's life and accomplishments, to teach students about diversity and inclusion. The program is being practiced in 500 Indiana schools, with hopes that it will spread to other states.

"I've seen it in action at schools," Ted noted. "People are including different people in their friend groups. To me, [it's great] that maybe, 20 years from now...a kid in an Indiana classroom could look across the room and see somebody else who doesn't look like him or think like him or walk like him. And [that kid might] think after going through EPIC, 'There's no reason why I can't be that person's friend.'"

Welcome one another...as Christ has welcomed you. (Romans 15:7)

Teach me to be a good friend, Price of Peace.

Pawsitive for Heroes

The old adage about a dog being man's best friend holds true for Dwayne Jensen, a U.S. Postal Service employee in Olean, New York. Jensen served in the first Gulf War as an Army air traffic controller and, as a result, suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which triggers bouts of "anxiety long after the trauma is over."

After learning about a Home Depot employee with PTSD who benefited from a service dog, Jensen looked into getting one of his own. Despite the adversarial relationship postal workers sometimes have with canines, he did his research and signed up for Pawsitive for Heroes, a program through WNY Heroes which pairs veterans with handlers who help them find and train the right service dog. Jensen was matched with Beau, a rescue shepherd mix from Alabama.

"[Beau] can sense if I have anxiety," Jensen told *The Postal Record*. "He can rub against me to take my mind off...[it] so I pay attention to him... He'll go everywhere around with me...The community loves it...I protect him; he protects me."

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

God, bless service animals, healers and guardians to all.

Novel Therapy Saves Child with Cancer

At age five, Emily Whitehead was the picture of good health until bruises started appearing on her body for unknown reasons. Soon, her gums started bleeding, and she began suffering from excruciating leg pain. Tests revealed that Emily had acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Traditional treatments didn't help her, so her father, Tom, prayed, "God, if You're up there, we need help right now."

Soon after, Tom had a vision of Emily getting better at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). After Tom and his wife, Kari, contacted CHOP, they learned that doctors there believed they could save Emily's life through a cutting-edge procedure called CAR T-cell therapy.

People magazine explained, "The treatment involves taking T-cells—a type of white blood cell critical in fighting infection—from the body, genetically engineering them in a lab over a three-week period to teach them how to fight cancer... then putting them back into the patient's blood." The treatment worked for Emily, and she has been cancer-free for 10 years.

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

*Guide doctors and scientists in saving lives,
Creator.*

Irish Blessings

The Irish are known for their blessings, which can lift someone's spirits. Here are several, collected by the websites *Aleteia.org* and *Parade.com*:

- “May peace and plenty be the first to lift the latch to your door, and happiness be your guest today and evermore.”
- “May you have warm words on a cold evening, a full moon on a dark night, and a smooth road all the way to your door.”
- “May you always find three welcomes in life: in a garden during summer, at a hearth during winter, and in the hearts of friends throughout all your years.”
- “May the raindrops fall lightly on your brow. May the soft winds freshen your spirit. May the sunshine brighten your heart. May the burdens of the day rest lightly upon you. And may God enfold you in the mantle of His love.”
- “May those who love us love us. And those that don't love us, may God turn their hearts. And if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles, so we'll know them by their limping.”

The blessing of the Lord be upon you! We bless you in the name of the Lord! (Psalm 129:8)

Bless and strengthen me and my loved ones all the days of our lives, Creator.

More than Shamrocks

In the United States, St. Patrick's Day is a time to celebrate Irish heritage and culture—and for some, an excuse to party. But who was the famous saint known for driving the snakes out of Ireland and Christianizing the island?

On the eve of St. Patrick's Day 2023, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* published an interview with Noreen Madden McInnes, director of the Office for Liturgy and Spirituality for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego.

“The story of St. Patrick is about a heart bursting with love for the Lord,” she explained, recalling how he was sold into slavery and taken from his family. “In dark years and in difficult times, when he experienced hardships and loneliness, he turned to God for comfort and consultation.”

St. Patrick spent 40 days fasting on a mountain before preaching. He used the shamrock clover to demonstrate the Holy Trinity. And above all, he is credited with bringing the love of Christ to Ireland. But it wasn't all seriousness. “He had to have been a fun guy,” McInnes observed. “The Irish love him. He had a twinkle in the eye.”

You are our glory and joy!
(1 Thessalonians 2:20)

*Let my joy in my faith radiate to warm others,
 Lord.*

To Reconcile with a Brother

Steve Dalton and his brother, David, grew up with a father who was an angry alcoholic. In one instance, their father screamed at David, “You were a mistake!” That comment scarred David for the rest of his life, leading him to struggle with mental illness and addiction.

David processed his emotional pain by acting out, while Steve tried to be a fatherly influence on his younger brother. It was a role Steve was not prepared for, and it only led David to resent him deeply.

When they were adults, Steve tried calling David to reconcile, but David would just yell at him and hang up the phone. Finally, Steve got the idea to text him instead. As Steve recalled on his website *Musings Amid the Thorns*, the message was simple: “I love you, David, and I wish we could be friends.”

David responded angrily for a while, but eventually he softened. The brothers even began talking again, ending their conversations with, “I love you.” When David died at age 61 due to complications from diabetes, Steve was at his bedside, holding his hand as he passed into the next life.

Be reconciled to your brother. (Matthew 5:24)

May divided family members know that it is never too late to pursue peace with each other, Redeemer.

Farming for a Better Future

For several summers, the Sisters of St. Joseph have invited a large group of environmentally conscious individuals to live on their 212-acre Brentwood, New York property. The visitors include ecology interns and individuals from the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), who want to participate in the Sisters' vital gardening ministry.

These nuns have always made good use of their green thumbs, being in possession of the "largest privately-owned solar array [solar panels] on Long Island," as well as having leased "28 acres of [their] land to local organic farmers and gardeners" for the past eight years.

Volunteer Josephina Starr told *The Tablet*, "It's super important to have knowledge of how to have an organic farm because it's being seen as one of the most important potential ways to feed America."

"I feel this farm in particular has an underlying acknowledgement of spirituality," Starr continued. "And the fact that the nuns own this land, and how they acknowledge the importance of...green methods of energy...is a good example."

**The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it.
(Psalm 24:1)**

Abba, may we strive to take good care of our environment.

Renewing Our Practice of Sabbath, Part 1

When we look at religious history, God introduced the concept of Sabbath to humanity thousands of years ago in the 10 Commandments. He was telling us we need to set aside one day a week to disconnect from our work and instead to connect with our deeper selves, our families and friends, and with God Himself.

It's a practice many have let slip away, but it's one we need to look at with renewed interest. Christopher Award-winning documentarian Martin Doblmeier explores that topic in his film *Sabbath*, which can be viewed for free at JourneyFilms.com.

In the film, Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch calls Sabbath—or Shabbat—a “revolutionary concept.” During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Doblmeier explained, “If you go back 3,000 years...it was the first time in human history that there was a mandated day off. In the Hebrew tradition, the Shabbat is the day of rest. That, in some ways, transformed humanity. And it was not just for human beings. The law says it's not only you who shall rest, but your family, the worker, the foreign person on your land, your animals...We have to grant the earth that we live on its day of rest...and that should happen every six days.”

Remember the sabbath day. (Exodus 20:8)

Remind me to make time for rest, Creator.

Renewing Our Practice of Sabbath, Part 2

In creating his documentary *Sabbath*, filmmaker Martin Doblmeier joined a Jewish family for its celebration of the Shabbat meal on a Friday evening, which begins with the lighting of candles.

He noted that the atmosphere in the room changed immediately afterwards to one of peace, rest, and putting worldly cares out of everyone's mind. "I think that's one of the privileges that's been given to humanity," commented Doblmeier, "to be able to light the candle and say, 'It's time to rest.'"

Civil rights activist Abraham Heschel's daughter revealed a similar family tradition, noting that her father never discussed politics on Shabbat. Doblmeier observed, "I thought that was refreshing because it's one thing to say, 'I'm not going to go to work today, but I'm still going to talk all day long about the culture wars.'...Not just the body [and] mind, but the soul needs that relaxation, to stop for 24 hours and say, 'I'm not going to think about these things because they infuriate me...Today is my day of disengagement. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to God.'"

**It shall be to you a sabbath of complete rest.
(Leviticus 23:32)**

Help me focus on peaceful thoughts, not angry ones, Lord.

Renewing Our Practice of Sabbath, Part 3

In making his documentary *Sabbath*, Martin Doblmeier visited Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church in downtown Los Angeles, where the large and vibrant Latino community finds comfort in communion with each other and with God every weekend at Mass.

Doblmeier said, “The congregation...was unique in the sense that many of those people are undocumented...They’re the working class...And so, there are a lot of people who come into the congregation with emotional stress, a sense of insecurity...Like in the Old Testament, they left oppression, traveled across a desert, find themselves strangers in a strange land. This is the biblical story.”

“Our Lady Queen of Angels...provides them a space where they can be with people who are struggling in the same way that they are... When you can actually be in the presence of other people who understand clearly what you’re going through and are able to sympathize with the struggles that you have, that becomes its own form of Sabbath rest.”

**You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.
(Leviticus 19:34)**

Guide those fleeing oppression, Yahweh.

Renewing Our Practice of Sabbath, Part 4

Filmmaker Martin Doblmeier wondered what it would be like to practice Sabbath in a place already focused on prayer. That's why he visited the Trappist monastery St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, in making his documentary *Sabbath*.

The monks, grounded in the concept of "Ora et labora" (prayer and work), labor on the land to produce the crops they need to make the jams and beers they sell. They also pray seven times a day every day. So, what makes their Sabbath special?

"St. Benedict, 1,500 years ago, gave a prescription for what Sabbath was supposed to be like for the monks," Doblmeier explained on *Christopher Closeup*. "Not only did he want the brothers to stop work for that particular day, but he also wanted them to study, to actually use the time for sacred reading."

"The rest of the world was not literate. Monks were literate...because they had the insistence of St. Benedict that Sabbath was the day set aside for sacred reading. You have to learn to read, and then be able to share that with others. So, it gave us another dimension to the whole Sabbath story."

Reading [my words]...will enable you to perceive...the mystery of Christ. (Ephesians 3:4)

*Remind me to make time for sacred reading,
Savior.*

Renewing Our Practice of Sabbath, Part 5

New Jersey's Princeton Theological Seminary includes a program called "Farminary." Led by theologian and author Nathan Stucky, it combines farming with seminary. Filmmaker Martin Doblmeier featured Farminary in his documentary *Sabbath*.

Doblmeier explained, "They're trying to teach people that [farming] is a collaborative event between the Creator and us, whereby we can put the seed into the ground, we can care for the earth that is going to produce for us, we harvest from it...These pastors now are learning this through a hands-on way, what it means to be part of creation.

"They may not turn out to be farmers...but they're going to be pastors who will be clear about the connection between the earth that we're entrusted with living in and our responsibility to it...They get a lot of vegetables out of 21 acres... They give a lot to the people in need in the community. So, it's an educational laboratory to learn where everything is done on theological grounds, and they're providing a gift to the community."

We are God's servants, working together; you are God's field. (1 Corinthians 3:9)

Teach us to cultivate and preserve Your creation, Lord.

Gabriel: God's Messenger

Gabriel Cobb from St. Louis, Missouri, isn't deterred by adversity. Growing up with Down syndrome, he often faced—and defied—the expectations of others. One by one, he piled up accomplishments, from reading Shakespeare, to playing the piano, to competing in triathlons. One of his biggest challenges, however, still lay before him: public speaking.

Gabriel, now age 22, was invited to speak at the United Nations in New York, on the topic of people with disabilities. Though he felt nervous, he practiced for a year and grew in confidence. Speaking to *Our Sunday Visitor*, Gabriel and his parents talked about the experience, his faith, and speaking out for people with disabilities.

“Gabriel is not a professional speaker, but somehow God thinks he has a message to share,” said Gabriel’s mother, Lori, adding their family stopped by nearby St. Agnes Church on their way to the U.N. building. Gabriel himself added, “After all, I am Gabriel, God’s messenger.”

**I am Gabriel...I have been sent to speak to you
and to bring you this good news. (Luke 1:19)**

*Let me stretch my talents for Your service,
Lord.*

A Community for the Homeless

The Casa Anita Complex in Chula Vista, California, was opened with one goal in mind: to give people experiencing homelessness a community to help them build stability. With homelessness becoming an increasing problem in California, this 90-unit complex aims to not only give people a roof over their heads, but to also build social bonds, friendships, and life skills.

Speaking to San Diego's *ABC 10 News*, Rebecca Louise, the President and CEO of Wakeland Housing and Development, said, "We have an onsite after school program. We do cooking classes, financial literacy, and for residents who are experiencing homelessness, we go deeper with intensive case management services to help them overcome their obstacles."

People living in those buildings can take advantage of the medical and support services available onsite. For residents like Amalik Rawsl, this community has been a lifesaver. "I had to be mentally ready to come off the streets because I was still in shock I was living in my car," Rawsl said. Now, living at Casa Anita has opened up new doors for him.

Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house. (Isaiah 58:7)

May those who need a hand up find willing helpers, Paraclete.

Compassion Walks the Road to Calvary

Years ago, when Sister Ave Clark worked as a second-grade teacher, her student Elizabeth was diagnosed with cancer. Sister Ave brought her an angel doll to hold onto for comfort.

Some time later, Elizabeth's parents called Sister Ave to say the end was near and ask if she would come with them to the hospital. Despite feeling emotionally devastated herself, Sister Ave mustered up the spiritual strength to accompany them because she realized, "Compassion walks the road to Calvary."

Upon entering Elizabeth's room, her mother broke down in tears, so Elizabeth told her, "Mom, don't cry. I'm going to go to heaven, and you said it's the best home I could ever have." Her father said, "You're our little angel."

Elizabeth turned to Sister Ave and said, "Sister, I don't need the doll anymore because I'll have all the angels in heaven. You take it, you give it to someone else." Sister Ave agreed. Elizabeth passed away an hour later.

Sister Ave recalled, "When they drove home, the mother said, 'Sister, your being with us gave us peace.' Did it take away their sorrow? No. But our presence can [bring] peace."

**Clothe yourselves with compassion.
(Colossians 3:12)**

Give me the fortitude to be compassionate, Jesus.

To Be an Apostle of Christ

In Jesus's day, people wore sandals as they walked the dirt roads, so their feet quickly became filthy. Washing the feet of a guest in your home, therefore, qualified as a dirty job. Yet washing the feet of the apostles is exactly what Jesus did at the Last Supper, asking, "Do you realize what I have done for you?"

So, why would the Savior of the world do such a thing? "What Jesus did stands before us as a defining example of humility and sacrifice, of service and love," observes Deacon Greg Kandra at *TheDeaconsBench.com*. "It tells us that to be an apostle of Christ means we must be willing to get down on our knees for another.

"In one sense, to wash the feet of someone else is to remove the dust and debris and the grit of life—to cleanse, to renew, to restore. But in a deeper sense, it challenges us to something more. It says the Christian life is not about standing above anyone. It is about bending. Giving. Serving. Restoring newness and hope."

If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)

Remind me that loving You involves serving others, Jesus.

Easing Grief

Do you remember John's account of the Crucifixion? John, of course, was the disciple whom Jesus loved, some say His best friend.

John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were at the foot of the cross. Just before He died, Jesus turned to His mother and said, "Woman, behold your son." And to John, He said, "Behold your mother."

Why would Jesus do something like that? One reason may be that Jesus knew His mother and His friend would be grief-stricken. So, He gave them each other, knowing that each could ease the other's grief. They would be there for one another, to care for and look after.

When you ease the grief of another, you follow the example of Jesus. You become Christlike. So, be there for those who are grieving. They need you.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

Jesus, may I treat those who are grieving with the sensitivity and compassion that You modeled.

Endings and Beginnings

Shortly before Good Friday in 2023, Greg Erlandson was both surprised and moved when his mother called him by his name for the first time in years. Bedridden at age 99 and living with dementia, her children, extended family, and several devoted caretakers were tending to her needs.

Erlandson found it hard to square the image of his now-frail mother with the strong and vital woman she used to be. He knew that her remaining days were short, so he relished the good times, which were always intermingled with bad ones.

Witnessing his mother's suffering, and taking into account his own emotional pain, Erlandson noted it is easier to believe in Good Friday than Easter Sunday. Still, his faith gives him hope.

At *Angelus News*, he observed, "Looking upon the body of my sleeping mother, a sleep that even now resembles death, I am speechless at the impenetrable mystery of it...Because of the sacrifice one God-man made 2,000 years ago...my mother's life does not end here. In her end will be a beginning."

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore... you. (1 Peter 5:10)

Sustain the families of the dying with Your love, Christ.

The Legend of the Easter Flower

Though lilies have become associated with Easter, Msgr. Owen Campion shared the legend of the holiday's original flower in *Our Sunday Visitor*. "At the time of Jesus, a plant grew in abundance in Palestine," he wrote. It looked ugly, produced no fruit or grain, and drooped as if exhausted.

"On Easter morning, this miserable plant witnessed the Resurrection," continued Msgr. Campion. "Jesus appeared as brilliant as 'lightning' (Mt. 28:3). The intense brightness miraculously changed the ugly plant forever.

"No longer did its blossom hang limp, but it stood boldly upright, energized by the sight it had seen. Its petals were transformed into golden yellow, absorbing and reflecting the burst of light that accompanied the Lord's return to earthly life and victory over death.

"As the plant grew to maturity, its blossom shifted its position during the day, always following the sunlight, searching for another sight of Jesus. They call this plant the 'sunflower.'"

I know that you are looking for Jesus...He is not here; for He has been raised. (Matthew 28:5-6)

May the spirit of the Risen Christ bloom within me.