



ADVENT 2023

As Advent begins this weekend, we enter into a season of waiting and preparation. Make a concentrated effort to enter into this spiritual time with a heart of joy and hope. Take advantage of moments throughout the day to thank God for sending Christ to us as a sign of his love and mercy.

There is no better time to revitalize your faith life than during the season of Advent, the beginning of the Church's liturgical year. St. Nicholas Day, Advent wreath traditions, Jesse trees, Immaculate Conception, and the feasts of St. Lucy, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and San Juan Diego can all remind us of the fullness of our Catholic faith. Follow our diocesan Facebook page for your daily reminders of God's love.

ST. NICHOLAS DAY ~ DECEMBER 6

Perform Good Deeds and Teach Children about the Real St. Nick

Celebrate **ST. NICHOLAS DAY** as an opportunity for the joy of giving and performing good deeds.

Throughout the world Saint Nicholas is remembered as a respected bishop with a generous spirit, choosing to live his life as a reflection of the love Christ has for each of us.

He was born in 270 AD in the Greek village of Patara (now Turkey between the Mediterranean and Black seas). His parents died when Nicholas was still a boy. He inherited their great wealth. He didn't spoil himself with it, he chose to use it to help the poor and sick. He dedicated himself as a servant of God, knowing his parents would be proud.

Around 325 AD, Bishop Nicholas, argued at the Council of Nicaea that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity be an integral part of the faith. The council's statement from that time has become part of the Nicene Creed, we still say in our churches today. The good saint died on Dec. 6, 343, AD. On St. Nicholas Day consider taking time to act like



Bishop Mark Brennan at the age of six (pictured at far right), visits Santa with his brother Paul at a Massachusetts department store. "I had no idea then that Santa Claus was St. Nicholas, a Catholic bishop. I just thought he brought kids toys."

St. Nicholas - donate food to a food pantry, donate shoes to a local shelter, or ask your local hospital about donating toys and activities for children who must spend Christmas there.

For the little ones in your life, on the eve of this feast day, share the Saint Nicholas story with them and that night place small treats in their shoes (slippers). Traditional surprises include coins, chocolates, clementines, prayer cards, candy canes, religious Christmas ornaments, Nativity figurine, etc.- simple gifts of sweet love and thoughtfulness, which is exactly what Bishop Nicholas has been celebrated for since 800 AD.

For more activities for your family and to learn more about the real

Santa - including what he might have looked like based on forensic science go to: WWW.STNICHOLASCENTER.ORG. To read the story of the St. Nicholas to your children go to: WWW.STNICHOLASCENTER.ORG/FOR-KIDS/STORIES-MORE/REAL-SANTA.

HEROIC VIRTUES HONORED IN LIFE OF TEEN



She died when she was just 14 from cancer, but even in her suffering Venerable Alexia Gonzalez-Barros found great joy, because she was intensely aware of the presence of God.

Alexia is on the path to be a saint for her heroic

virtues and the undeniable love of Christ as a martyr.

She was born in Madrid in 1971 to Francisco and Moncha Gonzalez-Barros. When she was eight, she received her first communion in Rome and the day after she was among the general audience with Pope Saint John Paul II. When he came close, she ran up to him and hugged him. He paused, kissed her forehead, and blessed her.

Alexia was so proud of her faith and would often ask her priest simple, but heartwarming questions, such as “Can I name my Guardian Angel?” Of course, he replied “Yes.” So she named hers Hugo. Her mother said she would talk and pray with Hugo every day.

THE EUCHARIST

She enjoyed praying before the Tabernacle. Her prayer was simple, but defined her character, “Jesus, may I always do

what You want.” Alexia’s family said she demonstrated her prayer in everyday life, especially during her illness.

After complaining of body aches, doctors discovered cancer – a tumor on her spinal cord. She was 13. Alexia underwent many surgeries and treatments, but eventually became paralyzed.



The hospital chaplain brought Alexia Holy Communion every day, which she said gave her strength and great joy. In a letter to her classmates she said, “You may find it hard to believe, but God gives us the strength we need. He even gives me reasons to laugh a little.”

Alexia passed away at the age of 14 on December 5, 1985.

In the documentary Alexia by Pedro Delgado in 2011, her loved ones shared that she accepted her suffering like a true hero for the Church, the pope, and for her family and friends. By doing so, she knew her suffering was meaningful, and her prayers were treasures.

Documentary alexia made in Spain. See highlights of that film here. [YOUTU.BE/PVGUCGE0oCw?si=NveFJL1RbYvB1EGg](https://youtu.be/PVGUCGE0oCw?si=NveFJL1RbYvB1EGg)

HONORING OUR RETIRED RELIGIOUS SISTERS AND BROTHERS

SPECIAL COLLECTION

DEC. 9-10

On Dec. 9-10 the faithful in the nation are asked to honor retired religious through the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) collection. Donations help thousands of elderly religious individuals retire with dignity.

This parish-based appeal is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), and proceeds help hundreds of religious communities in the United States to care for aging members.

Support from the Retirement Fund for Religious helps religious communities care for senior members while continuing important ministries to the People of God.



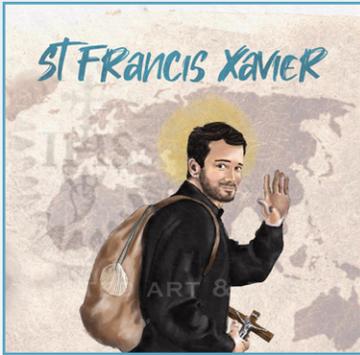
Please give generously to the upcoming collection.

Retirement Fund for Religious

Visit retiredreligious.org/2023photos to meet the religious pictured.
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ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

An example of hope, faith, and joy



As we begin Advent, recognize Dec. 3rd, the Feast Day of St. Francis Xavier, as a great time to reflect on our own works of evangelization and how we care for others. He chose to mirror the good he saw in his parents and those who put God first.

Saint Francis Xavier seemed pretty dynamic, happy, and confident; but he struggled with depression and loneliness. His father died when he was just a young boy; in his teens he left home to study in Paris; while there his mother and sister died; and his other siblings were all married with families of their own. However, he chose to turn those negative energies into a challenge to be courageous with God as his navigator. He considered his faith as the greatest gift from his reverent parents. He chose to be a fisher of men and share his love of Christ.

He earned degrees in philosophy and theology. While studying at the University of Paris, he met St. Ignatius Loyola. They became close friends. In 1534, together with

five other men they founded the Society of Jesus (the Jesuit order). In 1537, St. Francis Xavier was ordained a priest.

An unnamed fellow Jesuit said, “I have never met anyone more filled with faith and hope, more open-minded than Francis. He never seems to lose his great joy and enthusiasm. He talks to both the good and the bad. Anything he is asked to do, Francis does willingly, simply because he loves everyone.”

He chose that attitude. Despite what had to have been dangerous and often miserable travel and living conditions, he focused on God to keep him balanced and grateful. Not every stop or plan was successful for him, but he remained determined.

It is believed that he baptized as many as 100,000 people in his missionary travels to India and Asia.

On his feast day, let us pray we are enthusiastic, adventurous, and passionate about evangelizing as he was. Do not be afraid to share the love of Christ in your words and actions, mirroring those who nurtured that love in you.

Editor's note: The portrait is by Meghan Scdoris of Lincoln, Nebraska - Rooted Art and Design available on Etsy.

Fr. Akila Rodrigo
Marian Shrines Pilgrimage
October 7-18, 2024
(12 days)
\$4,999 from Pittsburgh

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Departure tax and current fuel charge

MARIAN SHRINES PILGRIMAGE FALL 2024

Father Akila Rodrigo invites the faithful of WV to join him and St. James Parish of Clarksburg to their Marian Shrines Pilgrimage from Oct. 7-18, 2024.

The trip is part of the parish's 100th anniversary celebration and includes visits to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where St. James is buried; the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal; the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France; and Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) Cathedral in Barcelona.

For more information contact Fr. Rodrigo at stjamesparishclarksburg@gmail.com; or Jenny Santilli, parish coordinator at jennysantilli@gmail.com.

BE CONFIDENT IN FAITH, WORRY NOT OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

As we celebrate the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12, let us take to heart the advice our Blessed Mother gave to Saint Juan Diego, a humble member of his Aztec community – be confident in faith, worry not.

“Let not your heart be disturbed... Am I not here, who is your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything.” (Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego)

We are all faced with anxiety, stress, struggles, and challenges, but Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us through the story of St. Juan Diego that she is always with the faithful.

On Dec. 9, 1531, when Our Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Juan, she was adamant that a church be built in her honor on the Tepeyac Hill near Mexico City. The bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumarraga, didn't believe St. Juan, when he told him about Mary's apparition and request. So Mary had him gather roses in his cloak to give to the bishop. These specific roses were impossible to have grown in that region, let alone that season without a miracle. Saint Juan did as Mary instructed and when he went to the bishop and opened his cloak, the roses fell to the ground and to their surprise the cloak had now taken the beautiful image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appearing on it.

The chapel was built, and the bishop made accommodations for St. Juan to live in a small home near the chapel, where the cloak was displaced for veneration. Saint Juan lived the rest of his life taking care of the church, remaining in prayer and boundless love of God and neighbor. He died in 1548 and was declared a saint in 2002.



The cloak is preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, shows a woman with native features and dress. She is supported by an angel whose wings are reminiscent of one of the major gods of the traditional religion of that area. The moon is beneath her feet and her blue mantle is covered with gold stars. The black girdle about her waist signifies that she is pregnant. Thus, the image graphically depicts the fact that Christ is to be “born” again among the peoples of the New World, and is a message as relevant

to the “New World” today as it was during the lifetime of Juan Diego, according to Vatican reports.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE TO JUAN DIEGO

December 12, 1531

“Let not your heart be disturbed.
Am I not here, who is your Mother?
Are you not under my protection?
Am I not your health?
Are you not happily within my fold?
What else do you wish?
Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything.”

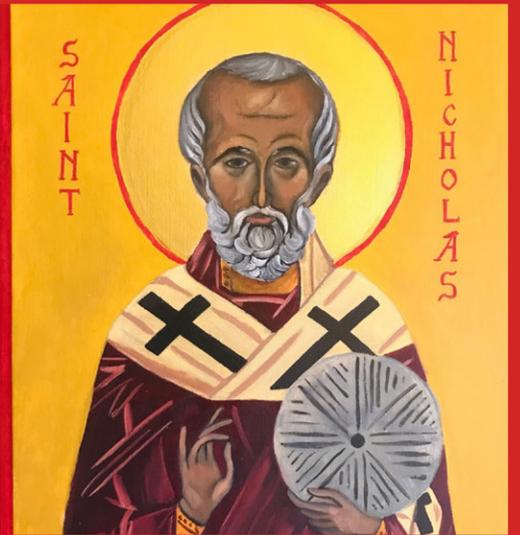
“No se turbe tu corazón
¿No estoy yo aquí, que soy tu Madre?
¿No estás bajo mi sombra?
¿No soy yo tu salud?
¿No estás por ventura en mi regazo?
¿Qué más necesitas?
No te apene ni te inquiete otra cosa”.



CONFRATERNITY OF ST. NICHOLAS

THE POWER OF PRAYER
TO HELP PROTECT CHILDREN

CONFRATERNITYOFSTNICHOLAS.ORG



As we begin Advent take time to learn about the Confraternity of St. Nicholas, honoring the saint who dedicated his life to Christ and protecting children.

The Confraternity of Saint Nicholas is a public association of the faithful who, through prayer, fasting, and good works, are dedicated to the protection of all children from scandalization, abuse, and trafficking.

The organization was created by Adam Marquart of Wheeling in 2021 with the approval of Bishop Mark Brennan. Membership has continually increased not only in the diocese, but also throughout the world.

The Confraternity seeks to create spiritual millstones and depths of prayer to drown those demons which inspire men and women to commit evil against children. The members of the Confraternity, by fulfilling its obligations, gain many spiritual benefits. Members enjoy the intercession of St. Nicholas, great wonder worker, Bishop, and patron of children. We pray that, as St. Nicholas defended the Divinity of Christ, he too by our prayers, fasting, and good works defends all children from harm.

For information and registration go to: CONFRATERNITYOFSTNICHOLAS.ORG

DAILY PRAYER OF THE CONFRATERNITY OF ST. NICHOLAS

Let us pray.

May we, aided by the prayers of St Nicholas, be strengthened on our earthly pilgrimage to pray, fast, and advocate for the protection of all children from scandal, abuse, and trafficking. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY ~ DEC. 8

First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15, 20

The story of sin and punishment, but also mercy. God created woman and named her Eve. She would become the mother of all the living.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.”

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

He chose us to be “holy and without blemish.” Let us be like Mary and bring Christ to others by the way we treat them and show love and mercy.

Gospel: Luke 1:26-28

Luke tells us the story of the Annunciation and Mary’s obedience to give birth to God’s son, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.”

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

BIBLE.USCCB.ORG/BIBLE/READINGS/120823.CFM

PRAYER INTENTIONS

For the Church, that we may follow Mary’s example of selfless obedience to God’s will, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For leaders of nations, that they do what is necessary to ensure the dignity of life is honored from conception to natural death, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For those struggling infertility, that they may know God’s presence in their sorrows, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For the people of this country, that we may emulate the Immaculate Virgin Mary, our patroness, bearing God’s grace into the world and on each other’s behalf, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

MARY FREE FROM SIN, FULL OF GRACE

An Address by Pope Francis for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

God chose Mary to be the Mother of Christ, blessing St. Anne to give birth to Mary, a sinless daughter – The Immaculate Conception - who would bring the Lord into the world. As we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we share the address from Pope Francis on this solemnity three years ago.

“Today’s liturgical feast celebrates one of the wonders of the story of salvation: the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Even she was saved by Christ, but in an extraordinary way, because God wanted that the mother of His Son not be touched by the misery of sin from the moment of her conception.

“And so, for the entire course of her earthly life, Mary was free from any stain of sin, she was the ‘full of grace’ (Luke 1:28), as the angel called her. She was favored by a singular action of the Holy Spirit so as to always remain

in perfect relationship with her Son, Jesus. Rather, she was Jesus’s disciple: His Mother and disciple. But there was no sin in her.”

“What Mary had from the beginning will be ours in the end, after we have passed through the purifying ‘bath’ of God’s grace,” he said.

“What opens the gates of paradise to us is God’s grace, received by us with faithfulness.”

He continued: “But be careful. It does not pay to be clever -- to continually postpone a serious evaluation of one’s own life, taking advantage of the Lord’s patience. He is patient. He waits for us, He is always ready to give us grace. We may be able to deceive people, but not

God; He knows our hearts better than we ourselves do.”

Editor’s note: the art with this article is by Nichole Lanthier available on Etsy.

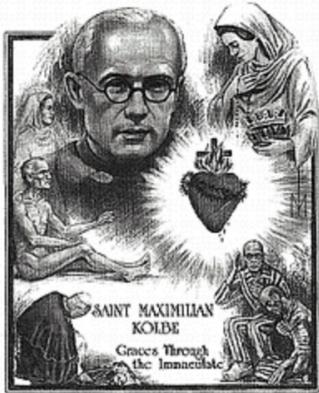


St. Maximilian Kolbe's Insights into the *Immaculate Conception*

by Michael Brumley



Editor's note: The following column is by Permanent Deacon Candidate Michael Brumley



On December 8th of 1854, consistent with Sacred Tradition, and in response to the desire within the Church, Blessed Pope Pius IX proclaimed, as dogma, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception:

...the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a

singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.

The Blessed Mother, four years later, in responding to Bernadette's request: "Tell me who you are." Answered: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Saint Maximilian Kolbe was born in 1894, just 40 years after the Church proclaimed the Immaculate Conception as dogma. He had a devotion to the Blessed Mother at an early age. Kolbe entered the Franciscan novitiate in 1910 and was ordained a priest in 1918 after earning doctorates in both philosophy and theology.

"In 1917 ... Kolbe founded the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), which sought... to win souls for Christ through Mary." By the beginning of World War II, the MI's magazine, Knight of the Immaculata had roughly one million copies per publication and had a presence in radio. His "impact in Poland was profound."

Throughout his life, Kolbe revisited the Blessed Virgin's words at Lourdes, and he contemplated what Mary was telling us about the Mother of God herself.

Kolbe knew that "with the name Immaculate Conception Mary gave us the secret of her heart." He reasoned that this name "point[s] up not only the fact that she was

conceived without sin, but also the manner in which this privilege belongs to her. It is not something accidental; it is something that belongs to her very nature. For she is Immaculate Conception in person" (quoting Kolbe, Feb 1933). For Kolbe these words "must be understood in a much more profound, much more beautiful and sublime meaning... a meaning beyond... human reason."

In 1940 and 1941 Kolbe was gathering thoughts in what he referred to as "sketches" in preparation for a book on Mariology. His writings during that time show that "he was still trying to clear up in his own mind the meaning of 'conception,' and how this term can be understood in God himself." Kolbe sought an answer within the Trinitarian life of God because he seemed to know that in calling herself the Immaculate Conception, Mary was not pointing to herself but rather giving us a window into the very mystery of the Holy Trinity.

His final sketch was made on February 17, 1941 just hours before he was arrested by the Gestapo and then later transferred to Auschwitz where he died in a starvation block that same year on the vigil for the Feast of the Assumption.

"Never be afraid to love the Blessed Mother too much, you could never love her more than Jesus did."

– St. Maximilian Kolbe

Kolbe frames this last sketch with the words "Immaculate Conception" noting that these words "...must tell us in the most precise and essential manner who she really is." Using the methods and precise language of "scholastic theology" Kolbe sought to "discover in God the principle which justifies Mary's astounding words." He notes first that "Humans do not exist before their conception, so we might call them created 'conceptions.' But you,

continue...

O Mary, ... are the unique, Immaculate Conception.” Kolbe then works through familiar teachings on the Trinity. “The Father begets the Son; the Spirit proceeds from Father and Son... And who is the Holy Spirit?” He asked. “The flowering of the love of the Father and the Son... the fruit of divine Love, that prototype of all created love, is necessarily a divine conception.” Kolbe concluded: “The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the uncreated, eternal conception, ... this infinitely holy, Immaculate Conception.”

But why would Mary call herself a name fitting only to the Holy Spirit? Kolbe reasoned that as the spouse of the Holy Spirit the “Immaculata... is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than can be predicated of any other creature.”

Kolbe, in reflecting on this spousal union: “It is above all an interior union, a union of her essence with the ‘essence’ of the Holy Spirit... The Holy Spirit lives in the soul of the Immaculata, in the depths of her very being. He makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity.”

Kolbe concluded that the Holy Spirit is divine “uncreated” Love in Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and she was overshadowed (Luke 1:35). From the first instance of

her life and from the moment of her fiat (Luke 1:38) she was the spouse of the Holy Spirit and took on the name of her spouse the Immaculate Conception. In the “Holy Spirit’s union with Mary we observe more than the love of two beings; in one there is all the love of the Blessed Trinity; in the other, all of creation’s love.”

Mary therefore is the “created Immaculate Conception.” For clarity, Kolbe is not implying that Mary is an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Mary is a creature, and she remains the human person in spousal unity with the Holy Spirit.

In his final “sketch” Kolbe arrived at an answer to the question of his heart - he understood Mary’s relationship within the Holy Trinity. His insights help us to contemplate the “mystery of Mary” and to further understand Mary as full of grace and her role in redemption and mediation.

Mary is a prototype of what God is inviting each of us to become - an invitation beyond our sight and insights (Is. 64:4). Saint Maximilian help us to understand Mary’s privileged relationship with the Holy Trinity, her role in the order of salvation and help us to hear our mother’s voice in our hearts.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ DEC. 3

First Reading: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

The prophet Isaiah pleads to God to come to earth and rescue those who have wandered away and give focus of those who are stubborn and do not have hope.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80

“Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.”

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

We wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Be prepared! The servants in Mark’s Gospel have many tasks - some are time consuming, some difficult, some easy - regardless of which, the lesson is to always be ready to receive Christ.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL SCRIPTURE TEXT](#)

BIBLE.USCCB.ORG/BIBLE/READINGS/120323.CFM

PRAYER INTENTIONS

That Church leaders and all those who represent the Church live and serve in such a way that they are the example of a life always alert and ready for the coming of Jesus in our world, let us pray to the Lord. . .

That leaders of nations work together to honor life from conception through natural death, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who have wandered away from the Church and those souls who are present, but just go through the motions, may this season of preparation for the King of Kings ignite the flame of the Holy Spirit within us, opening our minds, hearts, and eyes to Christ’s true presence in the Eucharist, let us pray to the Lord. . .

For all who care for and support the unborn, expecting mothers, soon-to-be fathers, may the Lord bless them in all ways with strength, compassion, and resources to do His will, let us pray to the Lord. . .

Lord hear our prayer

Faith IN WV

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MASS ONLINE

Saturday 6pm Masses will continue to be livestreamed from the Cathedral of St. Joseph, and will be available on our website each Sunday at DWC.ORG.