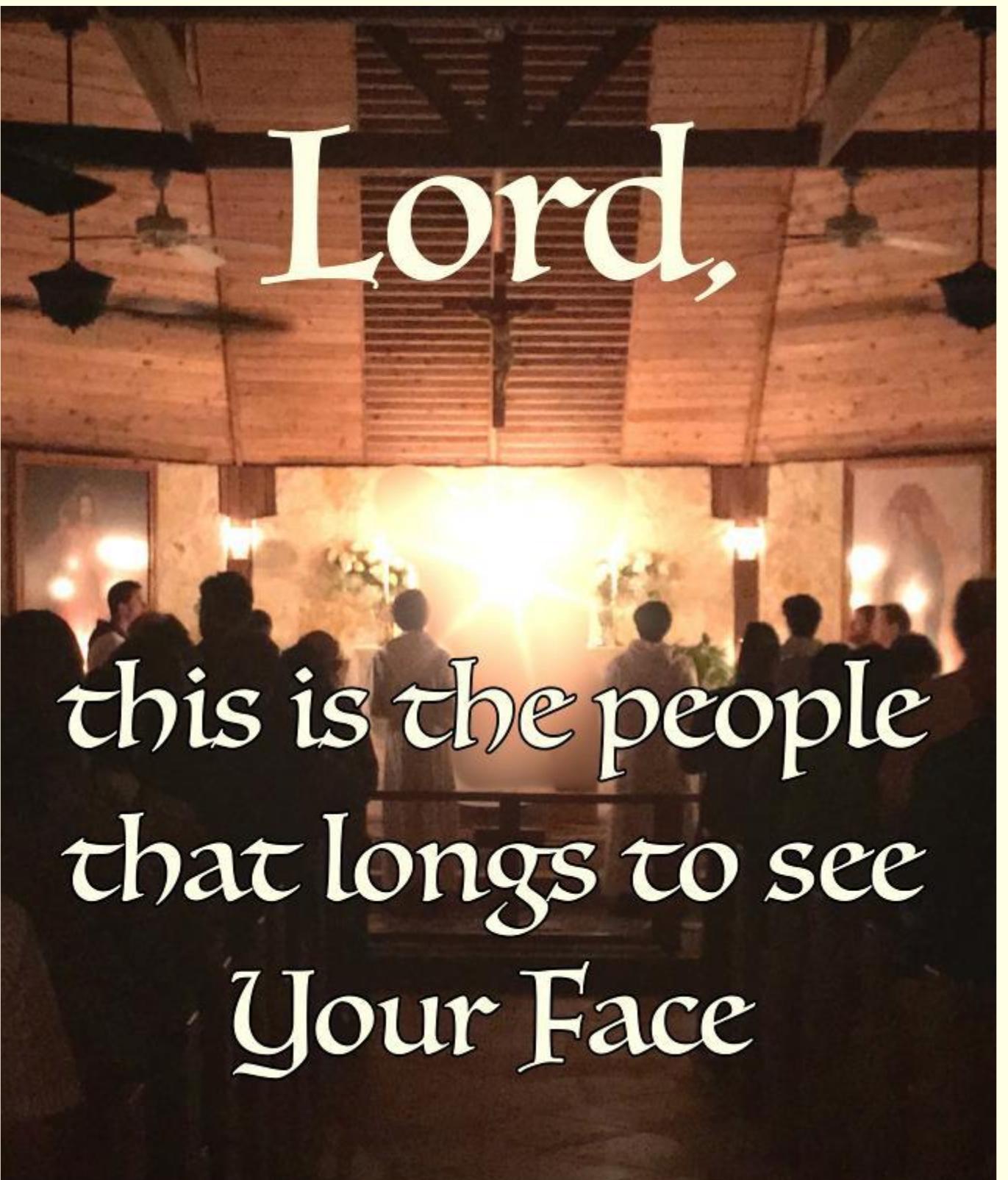


Mission of Divine Mercy



Lord,
this is the people
that longs to see
Your Face

Advent 2019



*Hand carved Madonna and Child
from Margaret Foster*

Years ago a friend of ours was seeking Jesus' direction for how she should spend Advent. She reached for the Diary of St. Faustina and it opened to the passage below. We have tried to reprint this every Advent since then.

The Mother of God has taught me how to prepare for the Feast of Christmas. She said to me:

*"My daughter,
strive after silence and humility,
so that Jesus,
Who dwells in your heart
continuously,
may be able to rest...."*

(See complete passage - #785)

Advent & Christmas Schedule

Dec. 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
Mass - 10 AM

Dec. 24

Christmas Vigil
Mass - 9 PM

Dec. 25

Christmas Day
The Quiet Mass - 11AM

Dec. 31

Vigil Mass of Mary Mother of God
Mass - 9 PM

Jan. 1

Mission Closed

Note: Burst of light at center of cover photo has been enhanced.



ADVENT AND AMERICA

from Father John Mary Foster, MDM

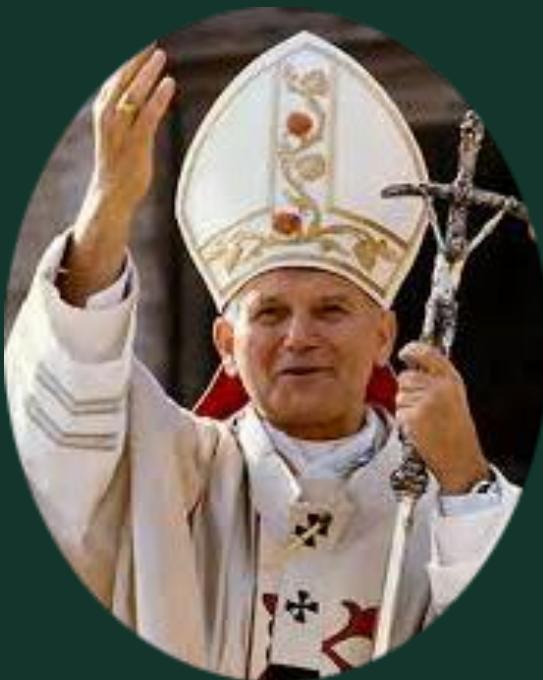
This time of early winter is densely packed with significant events: Thanksgiving; Advent; the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe; and the anniversary of our arrival in late November of 2001, in New Braunfels where our little Community found a home.

As I think back on the path that led to the founding of MDM, I am again conscious of how much St. John Paul was a light for us. And this same light provides illumination on Advent and America.

CHRIST CALLS THE NEW WORLD TO FAITH IN HIM

In 1992 I was a young priest and had been called from France to serve in Monterrey, Mexico. In that same year St. John Paul (then Pope John Paul II) came to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic on Oct. 12th to celebrate a momentous event that many of us didn't even notice: the 500th Anniversary of the first preaching of the Gospel in the New World:

“...when Christ first called America to faith” and where we see “Christ’s desire to meet the inhabitants of the ... New World so that, gathering them into His Church, He might be present in the continent’s history.”



The formative decades of my vocation were during the papacy of St. John Paul. I have always been nourished by his words, which offer both bold faith in Jesus Christ, and pastoral prudence. On that occasion of his visit to the Americas, the Pope announced a Synod of America, which took place in 1997. And, as a result of this synod, he published in 1999 an apostolic exhortation for the Church in America that focused **“...on the encounter with the living Jesus Christ: the way to conversion, communion and solidarity in America.”**

So in the years in which the Holy Spirit was preparing the future members of MDM – without us yet knowing it – for the future Mission of Divine Mercy, I was reflecting on this guidance from Pope John Paul II for America.

“JESUS CHRIST, THE HUMAN FACE OF GOD AND THE DIVINE FACE OF MAN”

St. John Paul, in this exhortation, is calling all the nations of the American continents to give thanks for the coming of Jesus to these lands:

“The greatest gift which America has received from the Lord is the faith which has forged its Christian identity.”

I have always been inspired, as here, by his focus on JESUS, “*the centrality of the person of the Risen Christ, and the certitude of His promise to be living and working with us.*”

“*Everything planned in the Church must have Christ and His Gospel as its starting point.*” Therefore, “*the Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man.*”

“*Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man.*” What beauty and depth in that affirmation.

As a nation, and as nations, we need to hold fast to the bonds that unite us as Christians, as members of the Body of Christ.

It was on the American continent that Pope John Paul II first called for a “*new evangelization,*” which “*must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of His name, His teaching, His life, His promises and the Kingdom which He has gained for us by His Paschal Mystery.*”

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, “QUEEN OF ALL AMERICA”

St. John Paul also emphasized the special presence of Our Blessed Mother in America. She is for America, as She has been from the beginning of the Church, “*the sure path to our meeting with Christ.*”

The apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the great sign from heaven of this.

I believe Her apparitions are the greatest event, not just for Mexico, but also for our whole continent. And I was encouraged to read what Archbishop Gomez of Los Angeles wrote about this apparition in 2017:

“*...I believe that this event is in fact the crucial moment in the history of the United States, and of every country in the Americas. It is key to understanding the Church’s purpose and to reconciling our political and cultural divisions.*”

“[She is] America’s true foundress....”

“*...[Her apparition] is the true “founding event” in American history. We are all children of Guadalupe and Guadalupe gives us the true history of America.”*



As St. John Paul said in his apostolic exhortation, ECCLESIA IN AMERICA:

“*How can we fail to emphasize the role which belongs to the Virgin Mary in relation to the pilgrim Church in America journeying towards its encounter with the Lord? Indeed, the Most Blessed Virgin ‘is linked in a special way to the birth of the Church in the history ... of the peoples of America; through Mary they came to encounter the Lord.’*”

“*...The appearance of Mary to the native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531 had a decisive effect on evangelization. Its influence greatly overflows the boundaries of Mexico, spreading to the whole Continent. ... not only in Central and South America, but in North America as well, the Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated as Queen of all America.*”

“*...It is my heartfelt hope that She, Whose intercession was responsible for strengthening the faith of the first disciples, will by Her maternal intercession guide the Church in America, obtaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as She once did for the early Church, so that the new evangelization may yield a splendid flowering of Christian life.*”

Our Lady of Guadalupe has been very present in the graces that prepared MDM. In the years I spent in Monterrey, Mexico, we were, very significantly, assigned to assist at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Experiencing the enormous popular response, still today, to Her apparition, that has never ceased to touch people,

I noticed that, of all the days of the year when God could have permitted Her appearance to Juan Diego, He placed it during the early weeks of Advent. So is not Our Lord Himself, precisely in the blessed season of Advent, inviting us, as Americans, to draw close to Her and ponder this grace? She Whose presence announced the first Advent, the first coming of the Gospel of Jesus to the New World.

A NEW ADVENT

In Advent, as we “prepare the way of the Lord,” Our Blessed Mother is particularly present. It was in Her and through Her that Jesus came to us the first time. She is the Mother Who gave to Him His human face. In Her apparition of Guadalupe, She prepared American hearts for Her Son, Our Lord Jesus. And She is with us today, in the Holy Spirit, consoling us and strengthening our hope as the Mother of the New Advent in the glorious return of Our Lord. She teaches us bold faith, humble obedience, trusting abandonment and persevering hope.

I remember being struck by St. John Paul’s insistence that the Church is living now a “New Advent.” And I reflect on how MDM was “conceived” at the very beginning of this new millen-

nium, to which St. John Paul attached so much significance. God’s plans are shrouded in mystery. Yet especially in these times, these difficult times, He is calling us to “hope against hope,” to trust the plans of His infinite Mercy and the triumph of His Holy Spirit.

I believe that the Lord wants MDM to be a little part of His great plans for “the New World,” and for the communion and solidarity He desires for all of us in America.

THANKSGIVING AND OUR ANNIVERSARY

MDM was “born” right at the time of Thanksgiving, a day so rich in meaning for our country. This year, on the 18th Anniversary of our Community on Sunday, Nov.17, we give thanks for His Providential care for His little MDM. We plan to make a special procession after Mass to the Teocalli, our outdoor sanctuary. Once there we will bless our newly installed Crucifix. We will be bringing together our Community, our Country and our Church under the sovereignty of Our Lord Jesus Christ and begging His blessing on all His children. ♦



WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD?

This September Angel Smith, 56, from New Braunfels, has joined us as an Applicant. She is discerning a vocation as a Consecrated Laywoman with the Mission of Divine Mercy.

Angel raised three sons and experienced a wide-ranging professional life that has included business management, training and development, and martial arts.

Early in her marriage some health challenges forced her to take a break from a non-stop schedule. Several years later when her marriage ended and her life took a new turn, Someone suddenly showed up. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that she finally became aware of Someone Who had been there all the time.

Once Jesus had her attention and then her cooperation, He soon had her heart. As she tried to surrender herself to whatever He wanted of her and to follow Him, she found that, for her, that meant following Him through the Mission.



For us with regard to vocational discernment it's pretty simple. There are two basic questions:

- * Is the Lord Himself truly calling you to MDM?
- * If so, are you willing to respond to Him?

A vocation to MDM can be harder for someone to discern and to respond to than a vocational call to another order.

MDM doesn't have the same quantifiable objective as, say, a teaching order; or a community based in healthcare; or a community with an apostolate to the poor like Mother Teresa's.

Yes, we do give retreats. But the vocation of the Mission is, above all, an interior vocation. "**FAITH, SO THAT GOD CAN ACT.**" It involves essentially a daily struggle to surrender one's will and one's life to Jesus. So that His Will be done; so that His Plan be realized. And that Plan might rarely be visible to, or supported by, those that surround us.

So Angel is committing this year to the Lord to sound out this vocation.

But I think we are fortunate in the fact that Angel already starts with a good idea of who and what MDM is. She began coming to the Mission for Mass and prayer almost as soon as her conversion began. After a while she began to volunteer in the kitchen during retreats, and then in the office so she has a pretty realistic sense of the daily nitty-gritty of Mission life. Happily, she also has been learning more and more deeply Who Jesus is and what He is asking of her.

We ourselves have never tried to actively drum up vocations for the Mission because it doesn't work. Only God can do that; only He can know and draw the ones He has chosen.

*"Unless the Lord build the city,
in vain do the builders labor." (Ps 131)*

We also know that the fact that a vocation is authentic – whether religious or lay, married or single – doesn't mean that it will be easy. Any true vocation lived for the Lord these days can be excruciating at times, and hard to be faithful to. Thus we live one day at a time; and pray JESUS, WE TRUST IN YOU! ◆

Mother Magdalene, MDM



New Crucifix
at the Teocalli blessed
by Father John Mary
after our Anniversary
Mass on Sunday,
November 17th.

NOT A HALLMARK MOVIE

"I began to die at Bethlehem."

These are the words Jesus spoke to one mystic about the Passion of His Incarnation.

The myth of the various commercial Christmas stories --- whether by Charles Dickens or by the Hallmark Channel --- rarely fail to appeal and satisfy. True love is found, the farm is saved, the snow begins to fall; good cheer all around. Happy endings are always good marketing.

The Birth of the God-Man, however, is a story of redemptive love; sacrificial love to the death. The happy ending is only visible from a supernatural perspective.

"I began to die at Bethlehem."

We are living in very strange times. One person asked recently, "Is someone slowly sucking the oxygen out of the room? Out of the world?"

Knock on any door. Even if on the surface lives seem to be normal --- following the regular progression that the world expects --- under the surface there are unexpected and profound sorrows. People are struggling with confusion, fatigue, discouragement and a seeming utter helplessness to right the wrongs that keep growing.

"I began to die at Bethlehem."

Humanly, Jesus the God-Incarnate, was never more utterly helpless than at the moment of His Birth, and during His Immolation on the Cross. And yet, these were actually the most powerful manifestations of world-altering Grace that the Cosmos has ever witnessed.

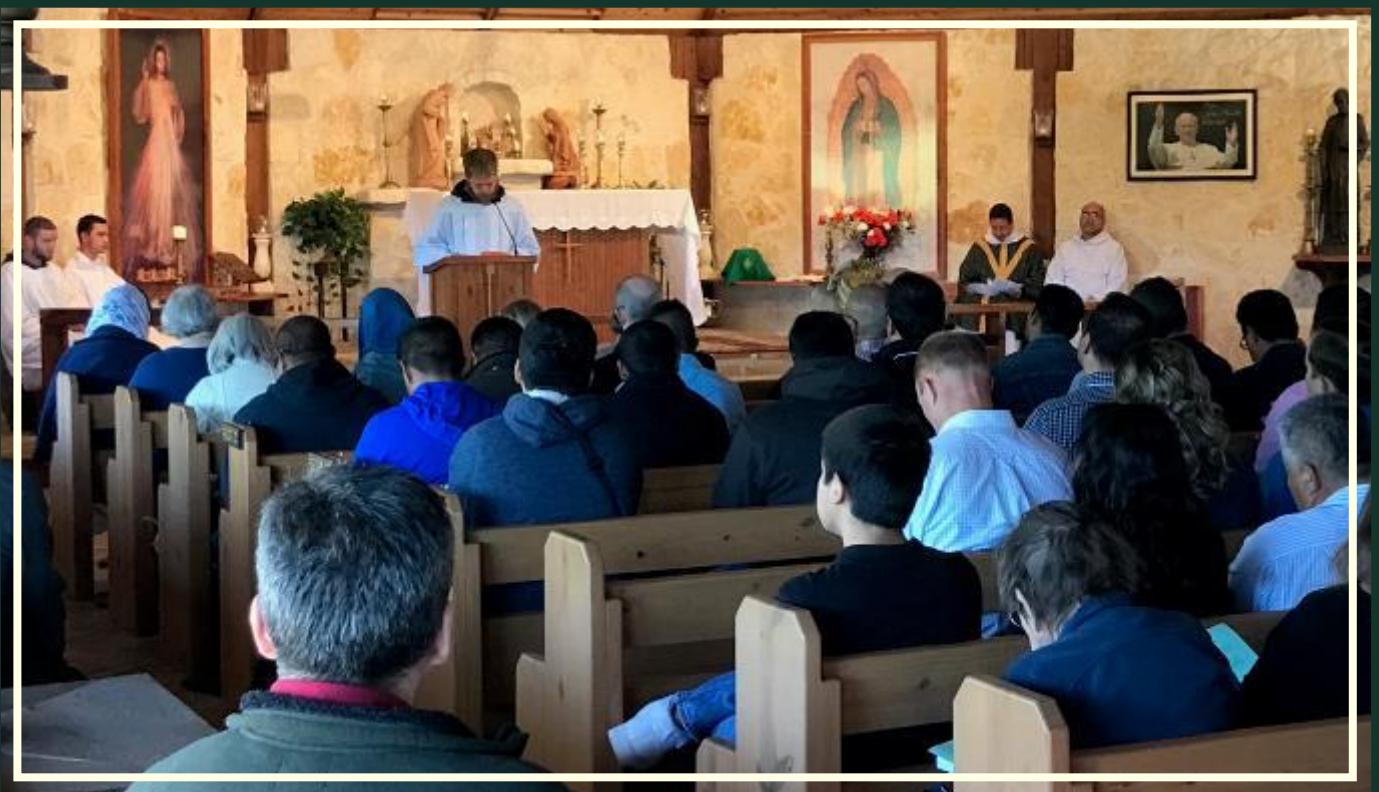
"For when I am weak, it is then that I am strong."
(2 Cor. 12:10)

In accepting the sorrows and limitations of our current situations, in accepting the Cross of the strange spiritual oppression that seems to be laid on the shoulders of so many of His Children these days (*Ps 34:18*), and then by offering and bearing that Cross --- we are united to His Birth and to His Death; to His Paschal Mystery --- and our quiet acceptance and struggle turns an infinite profit of Grace. ♦

"And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us." (*Jn 1:14*)

Mother Magdalene, MDM

“COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY...”



Here at the Mission during the week leading up to an *Encounter With Jesus* retreat we always know to be prepared for the septic system to back up, or the toilets to break down, or the well to go out, or the AC to quit working --- or any combination of the above. It just seems to happen, like clockwork. It always seems that someone --- who shall remain nameless --- doesn't like what is about to happen and tries his best to thwart it.

Fortunately, Dave Sommers and Raul are used to his tricks and are prepared to take action. So are the Holy Angels. The nameless one hasn't prevented an *Encounter* yet.

Community members also feel the attacks, but as Mother Magdalene advises, "The evil one feeds on drama, so don't provide it for him. Always try to under-react to a hard situation rather than over-react." This is great advice that we offer free to everyone.

But the Mission is not the only target. **Many of the retreatants comment on how unusually hard the week before the *Encounter* is:** sudden difficulties in the workplace, greater family problems, health issues, or, of course, car problems. Often the retreatants confess that they

had a strong urge to cancel rather than attend the retreat. So for many, just coming through the gates of the Mission feels like crossing the finish line after extreme exertion. They are ready to collapse before the retreat has even begun.

So if the *Encounters* bring on so many headaches, why do we bother putting them on again, and again, and again?

Because once the retreat does begin, it can offer a life-changing spiritual experience for those who make it.

And while it is a different experience for each individual, years of reading the input sheets make it clear that some experiences seem to be shared by most participants.

They almost always comment on their experience of the silence; their sense of spiritual growth; the presentations; the natural surroundings; Confession; their experience of the Person of Jesus; the impact of Mary as their Mother; the good food; and, oh yes, the snoring.

With the permission of the retreatants, we would like to share some of their comments with you. Remarks presented without names are from retreatants who permitted their comments, but withheld their names.

THE SILENCE - Community members give several talks, but the retreatants remain silent from Thursday night through Sunday noon. Silence envelops them for many hours. Some retreatants say that it was the idea of silence that drew them to the retreat in the first place.

But many admit that they were worried about the silence. Some say that they struggled with keeping silent. But at the end of the retreat, almost without exception, they said that they hated leaving the silence. And this occurs through all different age groups.

- **Manuel:** *It was a great experience. The silence was the most difficult part for me but well worth it. It helped me to focus more on the voice of God.*
- **Hector:** *Learning how trust and mercy were essential to knowing Jesus Christ, then being able to reflect on that in peace and quiet, was so beneficial to me.*
- **M.:** *The silence allowed me one-on-one time with Jesus and Mary.*
- **Rosa:** *I felt the silence was a sacrifice that was really a blessing.*
- **Sandy:** *I was worried about being distracted in the silence, but I learned how to turn these into*

small prayers all day. I found power in silence. Very simple, pure and intimate.

- **Anonymous:** *Loved the silence! I didn't miss the noise of the world at all.*
- **Lisa:** *It was deeply moving and affected me in ways that at times were emotional, but soothing. I felt a huge sense of relief at not speaking with anyone but Jesus and Mary. I was able to let the world, work and stress fall away so that I could open up space for Jesus to come in.*
- **Madonna:** *Not being forced to go from activity to activity actually made this feel like a retreat.*

SPIRITUAL GROWTH - One of the most striking aspects of reading the input sheets is to see **how well the retreat works for people of all different ages, and all stages of spiritual growth.** It doesn't matter whether you are a recent convert, have never made a retreat before, or have made a retreat every year for the last 40 years, the *EWJ* creates an opening for God to give to each retreatant what he or she needs.

- **Luis:** *The talks had so much good information to help me in my spiritual walk. There are many things that I have experienced and thought of as troublesome, e.g., dryness, attempting to pray when "just not feeling it," and then to learn that there is merit in them --- that was just so liberating!*
- **Andrew:** *I think that my original purpose in coming was to get a ticket to heaven. But because of the retreat my purpose is now to make Jesus smile, and to do that I need to love others as much as I love myself. I need to sacrifice, pray and also guide others to Jesus. That is how to show love to Our Lord.*
- **Anonymous:** *There is an emptiness that we feel when we are away from God. We try to fill the emptiness with material and sensational things that never work, even become addictions, and drive us close to the enemy. We need to draw close to God. This Encounter helped me to do that.*
- **Mary:** *You all prepared us at the beginning; telling us not to expect spiritual fireworks. That was good. But I felt so at peace and learned so much. Thank you.*
- **Nicholas:** *I came here as lukewarm as could be. I finally feel close to God again and have solid steps to move forward.*



- **Bryce:** Words do not describe how much this retreat meant to me. As I am young and learning, I have been battling with my Faith and what I truly want. I found that during this Encounter. From my first steps onto the Mission on Friday, I truly felt peaceful and happy (I haven't felt either in a good while).
 - **Rosario:** Prayer, adoration, confession and Mass will never be the same; all will have so much more meaning.
 - **Anonymous:** It was a struggle the first two days leading up to Confession. I felt cold all weekend. But I think it is in Jeremiah where it says something like "There is within me a great fire and I am weary from holding it in. I cannot." This is how I feel now. A great desire to share Christ more fervently and the grace to continue the mission He has called me to.
 - **Anonymous:** I discovered something so simple, yet so extraordinary. I realized that I don't have to keep adding things. I need to empty myself so that Jesus will fill me.
 - **Sarah:** I finally know where my home is after being lost for so long, and that is with God. After trying to find happiness and joy in false
- gods and superficial things, I was overwhelmed with the sense of being home.
- **Mary:** Giving my daughter and grandbabies to Jesus and Mary. It takes a load off! Mary said, "It will be alright." They are in Her hands forever.
 - **Anonymous:** My heart feels much lighter. I've welcomed Jesus in and given Him a place to rest.
 - **Sharon:** I needed something intensely spiritual. You provided that and more.
-

NATURE - When the Community was looking for land, they knew it was important to find good acreage where a person could experience silence, solitude and the ability to get away from traffic and technology. Again and again the retreatants mention how significant was the time spent hiking or wandering around the Mission, or just spending quiet time at different prayer locations. Br. Mikael has been heard to say: Yeah, we do all this work preparing the talks and activities, and what do they say? "The hike was where God really spoke to me."



- **Manual:** Being in adoration in the open air at St. Joseph's Chapel and with nature surrounding us made the experience more intimate. The breeze caressing my face felt like the touch of Jesus.
- **Anonymous:** The opportunity to hike on my own around the Mission made me feel like I was walking with Jesus.
- **Larry:** Even though I am often in nature, I had a special experience this time: a feeling of connection between myself, the reality of life beyond modernity, and the role and support of Christ's Church.
- **Anonymous:** Loved the silence, peace and no distractions. Loved the chance to be in nature.
- **Manuel:** During the hike on Friday I had the experience of the narrow path leading us to Jesus.
- **Anonymous:** The hike was great!



CONFESION - The opportunity for making a good Confession is another thing that many comment on. There is no pressure on the retreatants to make a sacramental Confession, but the talks and the spiritual activities help the retreatants to come to a greater awareness of sin and experience true repentance and trust in God's healing mercy. Most retreatants seem to seize the opportunity to go to Confession. Many comment on how important it was for them.

- **Jose:** My confession was the best I have ever made.
- **Julie:** The message that I needed to hear is that Christ's love and mercy is greater than our sins.
- **Anonymous:** I was able to heal many wounds and old sins that I had not confessed. God gave me the strength to remove them from my life.
- **Sharon:** I was so liberated through Confession. I did not know what freedom really was! Definitely the best Confession ever.

PRESENTERS - The presentations, offered by members of the MDM Community, provide solid, practical information to encourage spiritual growth, much of it learned through personal experience.

- **Rosa:** The presenters were very real and I felt that they knew my struggles and obstacles.

- **Amanda:** The talks seemed a little intimidating with regard to length when I was looking at the schedule. But they always went by very quickly because of the enthusiasm and knowledge when being presented.

- **Rosario:** The retreat was very well organized and the talks were very well prepared. It was especially helpful to learn about spiritual dryness.

- **Lisa:** Really well structured with talks that were enlightening, informative and helpful. And with a good amount of quiet time for reflection. It was well designed to allow Jesus to find the openings I created throughout.

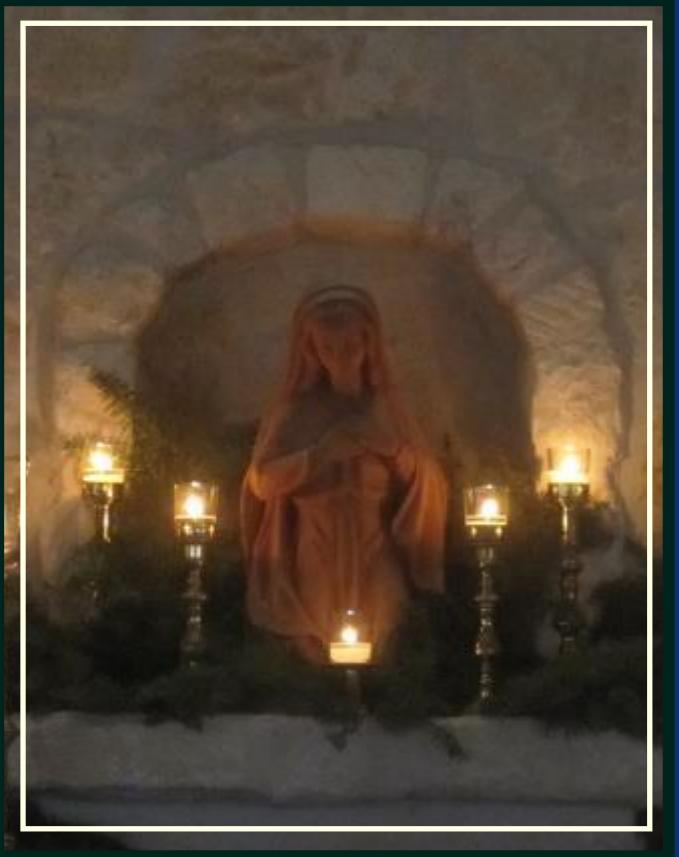
- **Sarah:** I enjoyed the talks very much. Sr. Amapola, Mother Magdalene, Br. Mikael and Fr. John Mary seemed to be the direct channels of what God needed to share with us.

- **Julie:** The retreat covers all the important aspects of our faith that were never covered in religion courses at school. Where I went, we made collages instead...

- **Anonymous:** The members of the Divine Mercy team are so real and down-to-earth and relatable. Their matter-of-fact approach to presenting the spiritual life with its highs and lows is a great service.

ENCOUNTERING JESUS - He is there for everyone. But they meet Him in different ways.

- **Bob:** *I didn't understand why I was here, but when Father held the Blessed Sacrament in front of me, it was if there were two eyes looking back at me.*
- **Donnie:** *It was nice to spend time relaxing with Jesus.*
- **Anonymous:** *I experienced the most profound Mass of my life this weekend.*
- **Jonathan:** *I loved the focus on Jesus and His Will as opposed to our experience and emotions. Despite years of study and teaching, I feel that for the first time in my life I have finally started a relationship with Jesus and Mary.*
- **Aaron:** *Have never been called by God or better unburdened my heart to allow God to lead me like I was being here.*
- **Larry:** *The talk on listening to God really helped me to get out of a dark place I was in. And the blessing with Our Lord in the Monstrance was very moving for me.*
- **Jerry:** *During and after adoration I experienced an unbelievable peace and tranquility. I have not been that at peace for decades. The feeling was exhilarating.*
- **Garrett:** *The best part of the weekend for me was the experience of Jesus, whose presence I feel so strongly in my heart when I am here.*



MEETING MARY - Discovering or re-experiencing the profound love of Mary as Mother.

- **Don:** *I was not expecting to know Mary through this experience, but Jesus showed me His Blessed Mother and revealed things I never knew about the Holy Family... or even my own family.*
- **Theresa:** *I felt a strong desire to consecrate our family to Mary's Immaculate Heart while we were hiking. I think that this is just what we need.*
- **Anonymous:** *I now have a deeper respect for the Blessed Virgin Mary and a better understanding of her role.*
- **Anonymous:** *It was made obvious to me through this weekend that what you can learn about God and the Blessed Mother is infinite. Reading "The Gospel as Revealed to Me" taught me so much about the Blessed Mother and God's love for her.*
- **Aaron:** *I started out in a fog, not knowing really where life would take my family and me. I left knowing that Mary is protecting and praying for us, and that she desires that I trust in her Son.*

GOOD FOOD - To give credit to the hard work of our volunteer kitchen staff, it has to be mentioned that 90% of the input sheets make some mention of how much they enjoyed the food and the friendliness of the servers. Just goes to show that you have to take care of the body as well as the soul.

- *Anonymous: The food was excellent! It was amazing to me how tired and hungry I got being quiet!*

SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST - And sometimes the Lord saves the best part of the retreat for afterward:

One recent retreatant called to say that he was describing his *EWJ* experience to his wife, and to his adult son, a good man who had been away from the Church for a while. To the gentleman's surprise, his son said that he would like to make the *Encounter* with his father, if he were to go again. "That," said the gentleman, "was the absolute best part of the weekend!" ♦



2020 Winter - Spring Retreat Schedule

Saturday Morning Retreats

January 11- Spanish

February 1 - English

March 7 - English

April 4 - Spanish

Encounter With Jesus Retreats

February 6-9 Women / Spanish

February 20-23 Women / English

March 12-15 Men / Spanish

March 26-29 Men / English

Triduum Retreat

April 9 -12

Hello Fellow Missionistas:

As President of MDM, LLC for over two years now, I find it pretty challenging to try to fulfill my directive to “Trust in Jesus, and keep the Mission gates open.”

Before coming to the Mission I worked as an engineer and project manager for over 30 years. I understand budgets, goals and spreadsheets. But I have a hard time understanding how the Mission exists when, practically and financially speaking, it shouldn’t.

But it does and we are approaching our 18th Anniversary.

Credit must be given to our dedicated staff that does everything in its power to reduce costs. Many of our “staff” are in fact volunteers who give a lot of time to the Mission. We couldn’t operate without their generous help.

But I am always looking for ways to reduce expenses; so much so that I seem to have gained a reputation among the staff as a “penny pincher”. That’s OK, I don’t mind. Last year we were short about \$20,000 per month, whereas this year it looks like we may break even; thanks in part to the many cost-saving efforts put in place.

Operating this Mission is not cheap. It is a big place with a lot of ground to maintain and several buildings to keep in good working order.

The *Encounter With Jesus* and *Cor Jesu* retreats are our primary apostolates, our primary work. However, it costs a lot more to run the retreats than the fees that we collect. These fees are kept low on purpose, so that we can welcome many who could not otherwise afford to attend. Those who are able, contribute generously at the end of the retreat. But it is very rare for us to cover our expenses. So why do we continue to do something that loses money?

If you have read the article in this same newsletter, “**Come to Me, All You Who Are Weary...**”, then you will know why. Because God does wonderful, amazing, beautiful, hidden, healing things for people during the *Encounters*. We hear stories that warm the heart and break the heart. And it happens with every retreat. **The Mission provides the opportunity and God does the work.** We believe that God wants us to continue the retreats so that He has the opportunity to do what only He can do.

But if you read that story you will also know that each *Encounter* brings its own attacks by the evil one. That is no exaggeration. Last year we had one “water” problem after another and this year it seems that all of the problems have been with air conditioners. I do not know why the Lord allows these attacks. What I do know is that they have been expensive to fix. A significant portion of our budget goes towards repairs.

And then there is keeping the Community housed, fed and clothed. Thank goodness that duct tape now comes in white. (If you’ve ever seen their weekday habits up close you will know what I mean.)

Once during the past year, when I was feeling particularly worried about how to make ends meet since there is no regular income to count on, I was advised: “**Entrust it to the Holy Angels. Trust God. He will act.**”

And He did. And He always does. But I must say that the Angels that He acts through have always appeared completely human to me. I haven’t seen a pair of wings yet.

We try to limit our requests for donations, knowing that so many of you already contribute so much from your gifts of time, talent and treasure. However, our Lord has willed this Mission into existence and has asked us to do our part to keep it running. And quite honestly, we only do it with your help and generosity. I ask you to pray about it and then, as the Lord moves you, to make a year-end donation to the Mission to sustain it.

Please help us to keep the Mission Gates open for all who are seeking the love and mercy of God. May God continue to Bless you and your families for your generosity,

Peter of the Heart of Jesus and Mary, MDM

Canonically speaking, MDM is a private association of the faithful, canonically recognized by, but not financially supported by, the Archdiocese of San Antonio. We are a 501 (c)3 nonprofit corporation. The Mission relies entirely on donations and the small fees collected for the retreats.

*A closet becomes the new copy room;
making use of every inch of space.*



It's always the copier...

THE FIRST ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE HOLY SOULS MEMORIALS

After Mass on November 2nd, the **Feast of All Souls**, friends, family and Community members gathered to remember some *very particular souls* --- the souls of their departed loved ones. Some who gathered smiled, some cried, but all watched and prayed as Fr. John Mary imparted the Church's blessing on the persons represented by each memorial. It is the Mission's intention to make this an annual event; blessing all of the new memorials that will have been installed during the past year. ♦♦

Found in the center space of the first row is a memorial to our dear Maria Felicitas.



WEAVING A BETTER WEBSITE

This past year the decision was made to upgrade our website, but instead of a renovation, we are building a completely new one from the ground up. We are able to do this because God brought a very talented young graphic designer our way, **Marina Nolen**. Marina is a recent college graduate with a major in Communication Design, working for a local firm and helping us in her spare time. Significantly, she also made an *Encounter With Jesus* a few months ago.

We have been working on the website for nearly a year. Finding time slots that worked for Marina's and the Sisters' schedules was the biggest obstacle. But in the process we also created a new logo for the Mission, featuring the Teocalli, which we introduced in the last newsletter. It helps to have someone working for us who also specializes in logo design.

The new website will have a few more bells and whistles. More photos. More updates. More news of what is happening at the Mission. And most importantly, it will be easier for people to navigate through.

We hope the grand reveal of our new website will coincide with our 18th Anniversary in November. As we "go to press" with this newsletter, the timing is still looking good, but all we can say is keep checking the website.

And from the perspective of our young Techie: "*Working with the Community to develop a brand identity, collateral and website for the Mission has been an extremely rewarding project that I've been able to watch come to life first hand. The goal was to create a brand that expresses the Mission's charism and personality, and I think that when we all got together, the Holy Spirit worked through us and we achieved that.*" ♦♦

SGI: An Insider's Account

by Garrett Layfield



For those who don't already know, the St. Gabriel Institute is MDM's discernment program for young men. It is an opportunity to pause for one or two semesters and give that time to God; and then listen as He gradually reveals His designs for one's life. Fr. John Mary has likened it to taking the time to pull over to the side of the road to study a road map instead of just driving blindly down a strange road and hoping to get to the right destination.

This semester we have one young man, Garrett Layfield, participating in the SGI. This is his account...

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on...your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

(Matthew 6:25-34)

It was a pleasant, sunny day in the spring-time of the year. And though I was enjoying being outdoors on this particular day, my thoughts were a bit preoccupied. I was strolling along one of the dusty, gravelly roads of the Mission of Divine Mercy, talking to Fr. John Mary. I had taken a few sessions of spiritual direction with him before, but this was a bit of an emergency meeting. I was a senior in high school and moving quickly towards graduation; three colleges which had accepted me were awaiting my final reply, with deadlines coming up within a month or two. And of course, I was freaking out. I had never been very good at making decisions, and this was the biggest one yet.

After listening patiently to my rantings on the problem, Father turned to me, his arms crossed casually over his chest, and said, "I already know what your vocation is."

"You do?" I stared at him, confused. "What is it?"

"Your vocation," he said, "is to know, love, and serve the Lord, and to do His Will."

Great, I thought. Would it hurt to be just a little more specific?

The better part of a year later, I'm starting to see what he meant. How so? Well, for one thing, I'm in the St. Gabriel Institute for a semester.

Initially, I had no thought of entering MDM's discernment program. Or at least I wouldn't listen to such a thought. I wanted to wrap up high school and then get my life started; I was trying to stay open to whatever vocation God had in store for me, but I didn't see any reason to spend a year just sitting around. Of course, there was the problem of not knowing where I should go or what I should do, but honestly, I kinda considered that to be God's fault. *Why can't He just send me a vocation letter or something?*

But after that one walk with Fr. John Mary, as well as several other such conversations (Br. Mikael claims to have been the first one to make such a suggestion to me, and he could be right, for all I know), I began to seriously think about — well — spending a year sitting around, essentially, to try and accomplish two things: 1) bring myself closer to God, and 2) get Him to tell me what on earth I'm supposed to do with the rest of my life. Or at least the next *part* of my life.

Speaking of my life, I suppose I should introduce myself. Garrett's the name. At 19 years, I'm the oldest of six kids. My parents, Larry and Angela Layfield, first came out to the Mission in 2008 or so, dragging me along with them, and I've been out here ever since. And I like it. The rustic outdoor settings provide beauty and adventure, the atmosphere is friendly and prayerful — and have you tasted the beans they serve after Saturday Mass? Hard to beat, those beans. Of course, I couldn't be too sure; I'm not much of a cook. But I do enjoy reading, writing, drawing cartoons, birding, hiking, music and joking around. And I may look serious when I serve at the Altar, but don't worry, I like that too.

All things considered, I like the SGI as well. It's definitely been quite the ride, challenging, but fun. Take the living situation, for example: I've been staying with the Brothers in their temporary quarters in that ancient green edifice known as the Camp House, which is an adventure in and of itself. I heard that Dave Sommers had recently declared that it ought to be torn down before it collapsed. And the Brothers do have a much nicer place to live, but Br. Mikael



seemed to think that it would be good to make the Camp House the living space for the SGI – I think he said something about it building character.

And then there's the routine. I can't help but compare it to the motto of St. Benedict of Nursia, "*Ora et labora*" ("Prayer and work"). When I first arrived, Mother Magdalene jokingly referred to me as "the new slave labor," and sometimes I think she was right. With a schedule built around prayer, work, spiritual reading, and time spent with the MDM Community, the SGI really is simply an *ora et labora* kind of deal. Not that the definition of "work" is very simple around here. So far, I've played the role of janitor, moving man, Gregorian chant instructor, chauffeur, granola baker, carpenter, all-around handyman, little helper buddy, and community jester, to boot. (I guess the jester part wasn't required. It just sort of came with the package.)

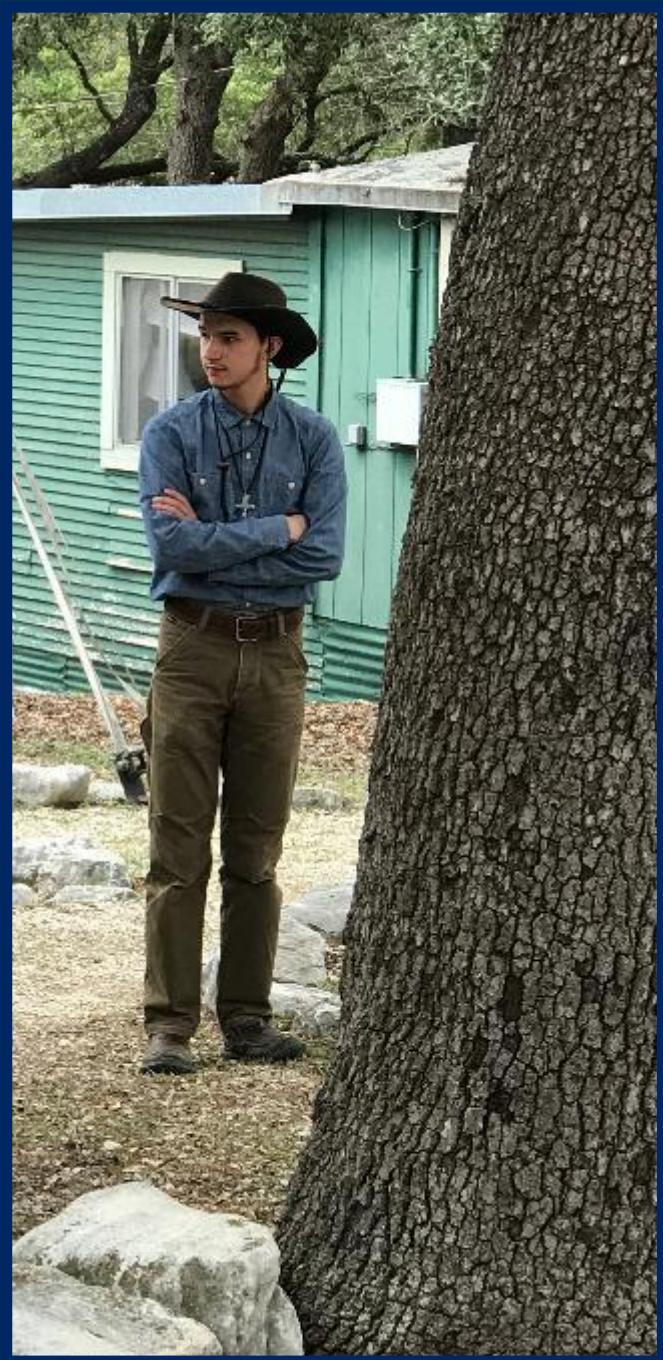
But, as they say at that fount of wisdom, McDonald's, "I'm lovin' it." Nearing two months in at the time of writing, I'm becoming more and more aware of just how important Father's vocation advice was. Because even though everyone has a unique and special vocation, each and every God-given vocation can be narrowed down to this: to do His Will. **If you're not doing God's Will, you're not following your vocation. It's that simple.** Of course, there are times when it's difficult to discern what God's Will is for us, especially in this hubbub-filled world of ours; take my what-do-I-do-with-my-life decision, for instance. In the face of this pressure and others, I'm very thankful for what I've learned during my time here: that no matter how chaotic and complicated things seem, the important thing is to actively seek the Lord's Will, and all else will follow. I don't know for sure where God will lead me after this semester, but I won't let that bother me — I'm putting it in His hands. A difficult course of action, but one that pays off, big time — in God's time, of course. ☺

Now, don't you dare think that that's the ONLY lesson I learned. There were other things, like that you shouldn't judge by feelings (they're about as reliable as Texas weather), how wild hog meat tastes (surprisingly similar to beef), what the MDM Community does on Monday (God's Will, enough said), and many other amazing things. But a fellow has to stop somewhere. So I shall. Right now. Except for a closing prayer, because closing prayers are a great closure to close things with. And this one is pretty epic, you've gotta admit.

*Eternal God,
in Whom mercy is endless and the treasury of
compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us
and increase Your mercy in us, so that in
difficult moments we might not despair nor
become despondent, but with great confidence
submit ourselves to Your Holy Will, which is
Love and Mercy Itself. (Diary 950)*



Father, Thy Will be done. Amen.





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Silent Night,

Holy Night...

