

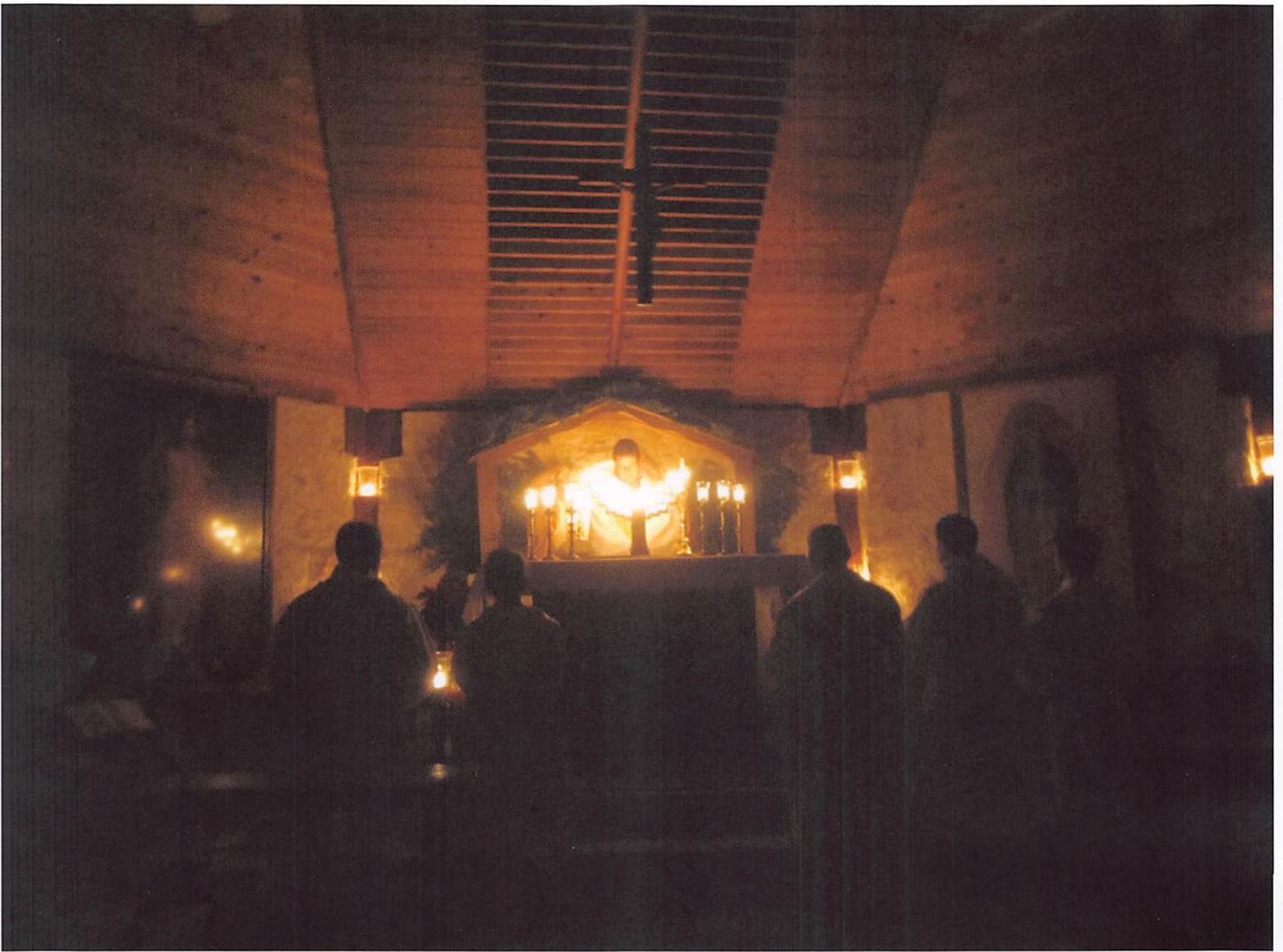
Mission of Divine Mercy

ADVENT 2016, A.D.



Our Lady of Guadalupe • December 12th

*"Listen and keep in your heart, My youngest son,
that there is nothing for you to fear, nothing to afflict you...
Am I not here, I Who am your Mother?"*



*L*isten and keep in your heart, My youngest son, that there is nothing for you to fear, nothing to afflict you.

Let neither your face nor your heart be worried.

Do not fear this nor any other illness, nor anything pounding nor afflicting.

Am I not here, I Who am your Mother?

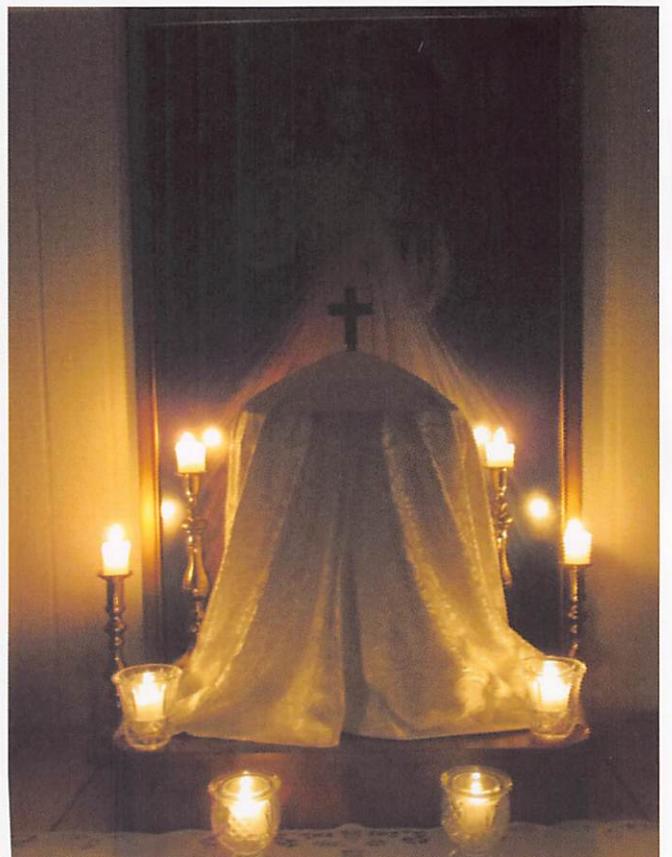
Are you not in My shadow, under My protection?

Am I not the fountain of your joy?

Are you not in the fold of My mantle, in My crossed arms?

Is there anything else you need?"

Our Lady to St. Juan Diego



FROM FR. JOHN MARY:

DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

When You Have to Make a Decision

HOLIDAY DECISIONS

One of the causes of stress during the Christmas holidays is the many decisions that we have to make because our normal routine is changed. Decisions about how we are going to spend the holidays, decisions about visits with family and relatives, decisions about celebrations and gifts....

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS — BIG DECISIONS

The time of the first Christmas was also one of decisions. Big decisions. Mary's decision about how to respond to the Angel's message. The decision to go to help Her cousin Elizabeth. The decision of whether or not to tell Joseph what had happened. Joseph's decision about what to do when he realized that Mary was with child. Then the decision to leave Nazareth for Bethlehem. And where to spend the night at Bethlehem. And what to do when he is told in a dream to flee to Egypt. Many, many decisions.

WHEN WE HAVE TO MAKE DECISIONS

We have to make decisions, little or big, every day. And sometimes people may come to us asking for help in the decisions and problems that they are facing.

Depending on the issue, making a decision for ourselves or advising someone else can carry big consequences...even life-changing consequences. A bad decision and bad advice can cause a lot of damage.

We have all been there.

MY EXPERIENCE

As a Priest, people come to me asking for advice for difficult situations that they are facing. Sometimes I think I know how to respond. Sometimes I don't. Many times the situations are delicate and uncertain.

I want to share here what I have found helpful in the hopes that it can be helpful for you too.

After I have listened to the person, and when I am not sure how to respond, I find it is often helpful to take a couple of minutes to pray in silence with them. If you're in a situation

where it's better not to say "pray", you could say let's take a few minutes to think about this or reflect on this. People appreciate this sign of the seriousness with which you're taking your question.

Sometimes, in that brief time of prayer, a light or new understanding of the situation comes to my mind. It seems like the help of the Holy Spirit.

But sometimes, nothing comes to mind. In those cases I simply continue with the conversation. Often, as I continue, a new light on the situation will gradually come to me.

But whether a new light comes right away or not, just the fact of making this simple act opens you and the decision or situation to the grace of God.

POWER OF THIS SIMPLE ACT

Let's look at why this act is so helpful.

Humility

First, it is an act of humility, because I am recognizing that I don't have all the answers. And humility is the crucial first step. As the Lord taught St. Faustina, humility is simply the truth. She writes, "*A humble soul does not trust itself, but places all its confidence in God.*"

Faith

It is also an act of faith. Having faith that God is real and that He loves us. That He is the One Who knows what is best. That He is not a God Who is far-off and aloof, but a God Who wants to be close and involved with us. In all of our decisions. Isn't that at the heart of Christmas: "Emmanuel, God-with-us"?

Obedience

It is an act of obedience in that I'm seeking to do His Will.

Love

And that is an act of love. "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*" (Jn 14:15)

CONCLUSIONS

So even if I don't sense a response right away, this little act is a way of opening my life to Him. It also invites His Presence into the decision that needs to be made.

Doing so is a gift that you are giving Him, one which opens you to receive His gift, His light.

So next time you're trying to make a difficult decision or give advice in a hard situation, try it. ♦

Popular images of the Christmas season usually project a scenario of perfect material and emotional happiness; all conflicts are resolved. The reality is usually quite different. And the effect of those scenarios sometimes simply makes us feel more acutely the sorrow and brokenness in our own lives.

The following is not a Christmas story in the popular sense, but it is in the true sense of Sacrificial Love born into the world at Bethlehem to defeat cruelty and sin; to redeem.

We are grateful to a friend from one of the EWJ retreats who has permitted us to share her story.

On the Brink of Suicide

I grew up in a household of seven – my parents, four brothers, and me, their only daughter. It was a happy home. My father and mother had a lot of friends. We would either go visit them or they would come over for bar-b-que. What I enjoyed most was when we would meet at the beach and go fishing or crabbing.

I had two best friends during my elementary school years. At school we tried to outdo each other by making the best grades. After school we would play at each other's homes. We were so eager to start the seventh grade because we would be meeting new kids, new teachers, and there would be football games.

When seventh grade finally started it was everything I had imagined. The first week was terrific. My best friends and I were happy with our classrooms and the abundance of cute boys. But towards the middle of the second week things began to change. For some reason some of the kids started giving me angry looks. I didn't understand why so I just figured they were having a bad day. The next day other kids gave me dirty looks and one even called me an ugly name. By the third week of school things had changed completely. It seemed like everyone disliked me. What saddened me the most was that my two best friends had stopped talking to me at school. And yet after school they would come over to play. I felt very hurt that they would treat me like that so I started making excuses not to play with them anymore.

It seemed to get worse every day and I began to cry myself to sleep at night, dreading to go back to school. My grades started to drop and my parents became concerned. I managed to give them an excuse as to why my grades were not good and promised to do better. I couldn't tell my parents the truth because I knew they would go straight to school and demand that the kids get along with me. I knew even at that age that you can't make people like you; they have to accept you for who you are.

Name calling, dirty looks and cussing was not enough for them, so they started pushing and shoving me between classes. One day I went to the restroom and as I was getting out of the stall three girls came in. One of them told the other two to hold the door shut. The third one came toward me and said she was going to beat me up. I had never seen these girls before and I couldn't understand why they wanted to do this. Then she said, "Who do you think you are? Do you think you're better than us because your friends are Anglos?" Just then a teacher was pushing the door open and asked what was going on. The three girls said nothing was going on and left. From that day on I stopped using the school restroom.

But I couldn't stop thinking about what that girl had said. At home I asked my mom what an Anglo was and was I one. She told me I was Hispanic. I was stunned and asked her why she never told me. She said we were all God's children and in His Eyes we were all the

same. That's what I thought too, but these kids forced me to take my blinders off and to see them in a different light. I also saw that my parents' friends were Anglos, Blacks, as well as Hispanics. But my parents never told me that their Black friends were coming over or that we were going to visit their Anglo friends. They were just friends. I was sad that these kids did not see themselves as kids instead of different ethnic groups.

Now I understood what was going on but it didn't lessen the cruelty or abuse I received each day. One day when I thought it couldn't get any worse, it did.

I was cutting across the courtyard to get to my next class; it was the quickest and shortest route. Someone pushed me from behind, and I fell to the ground and my skirt flew up. I sat up and looked around. I saw everyone was laughing and pointing at me. I looked to see if there was one person that could help me get up or at least give me a helping hand in gathering my books. There was no one, not one person to show me any kind of kindness. As I sat there I could feel my heart being pierced. I could feel my sadness, hurt, shame, loneliness, humiliation, helplessness, and hopelessness drain from my body. I also felt love, joy, peace, and happiness drain out of me. By the time the school bell rang the draining process was complete. I felt nothing. I was nothing. I did not shed one tear. Because I no longer had a heart.

My memory fades but the next thing I remember I was walking home after school. My body knew how to get itself home; it had done it many times. I remember walking through the back door. My mother was at the kitchen sink cutting up a chicken for supper.

She turned around with a big smile on her face and said, "Hi, Hija, how was your day?" I mechanically answered that it was OK, I was tired, and I was going to take a nap.

I went to my room and closed the door. Then I went and closed the blinds and drew the curtains. I then climbed on my bed and curled up in a fetal position. As I lay there I began to think of a way to kill myself. I knew my body couldn't continue to walk around without a heart.



I thought about shooting myself; my father was a hunter. But he kept the gun cabinet locked and the bullets hidden. So I thought about poisoning myself but there wasn't enough of anything around to even kill a mouse. Then I remembered; my father had a very sharp fillet knife which he used on the fish he caught. He was always so careful with it because he didn't want anyone to get hurt. I knew where he kept his knife. And so my body decided how it would end its life.

I don't remember the rest of the day. I guess my body knew how to perform well enough not to raise any red flags. I do remember going to bed early. I was hoping everyone else would also so that my body could do what it had to do.

I lay there waiting and listening. While I lay there a thought came to my mind: After stabbing myself there would be a bloody mess. I knew my mother and father would be the ones to clean up the mess. I began to think about my parents. They were always so good to me. Even though I was their only daughter they didn't spoil me with a lot of toys or things. Every weekend they would take us to the beach or the park or just spend time with us at home. My parents loved me. They loved me. And when I realized that they loved me suddenly all my emotions came pouring back into my body.

I could feel my parents love for me and my love for them. Joy, happiness, as well as the sadness, hurt, shame, humiliation all came flooding back into my heart. That was the moment I started to cry.

As I cried I said an Our Father and a Hail Mary. I didn't think God would know what I had been experiencing and all I could say was, "God, help me!" I said it over and over through my tears until I finally fell asleep.

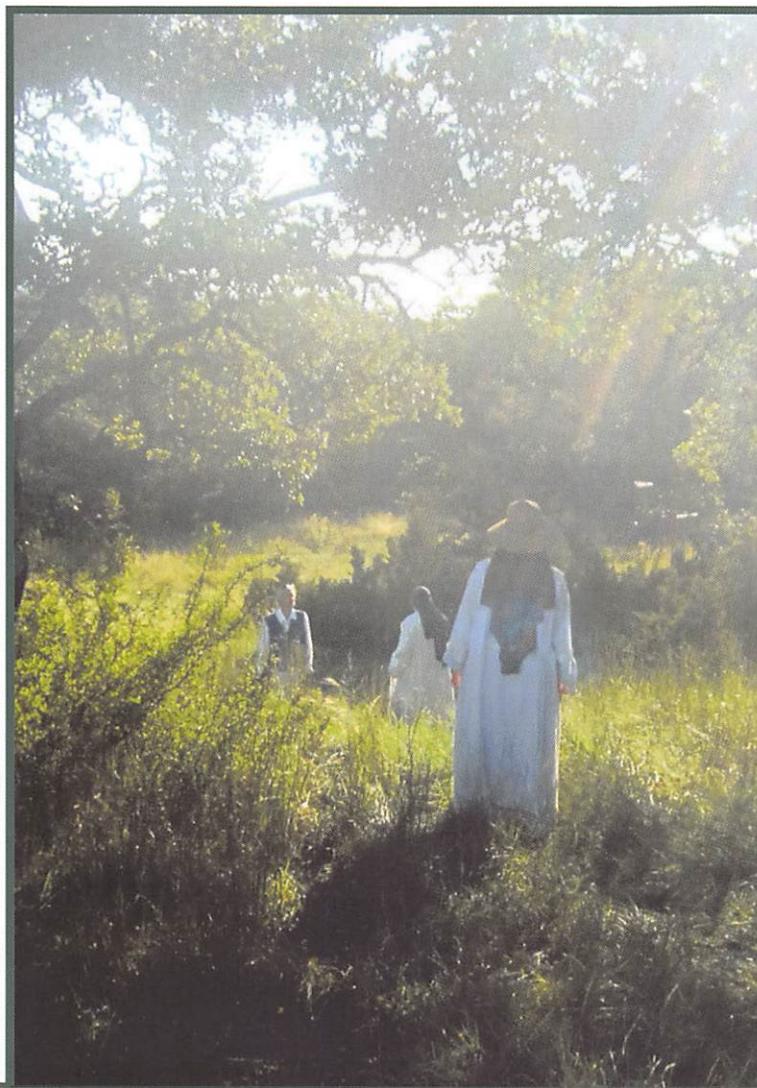
When I awoke the next morning, I felt a tremendous love for my parents as well as extreme guilt for what I had been planning to do. My parents probably thought I was a little wacky because I gave them so many hugs and kisses before I went to school. As I walked to school I was thinking of buying something very special for my parents to show my love for them. My piggy bank was half full with dimes so I knew I couldn't buy anything special. Just then I looked up and saw my school. Suddenly I realized what I could give my parents. My grades were really bad and I remembered how happy they were when I brought home an all A report card during my elementary years. And so I went to school focused on my love for my parents and on school.

It was still rough that day, but definitely not as bad as the day before. The next day came and it was a little bit better than the day before. Every day seemed to slowly get better. By the end of the school year the cruelty and abuse had stopped and I actually had a friend. My grades were back to A's and B's which made my parents very happy. And I buried that memory so deep within me that I completely forgot about it.

Fifty years later, in 2000, my parish started a food pantry. I was asked to be the coordinator. It was such a blessing and a joy. I was also a member of the prayer group. One night the leader of the prayer group

asked me what was it that made me say yes to being coordinator. I simply replied that it made me feel good to help others.

I went home wondering why it made me feel good. That's when all the memory of the 7th grade came back to me. I know now that it was the Holy Spirit that placed the thought of my parents in my soul that night. I know it was Jesus Christ that brought back all my emotions and feelings so I could feel the love between me and my parents. And I know that it was God My Savior Who saved me from taking my life. I also know that the Holy Trinity placed the seeds of compassion deep in my heart. This seed had grown through the years. There have been many times that the Holy Trinity has given me strength and courage to help or show kindness to others in need. I give all glory and praise to My Savior. ♦

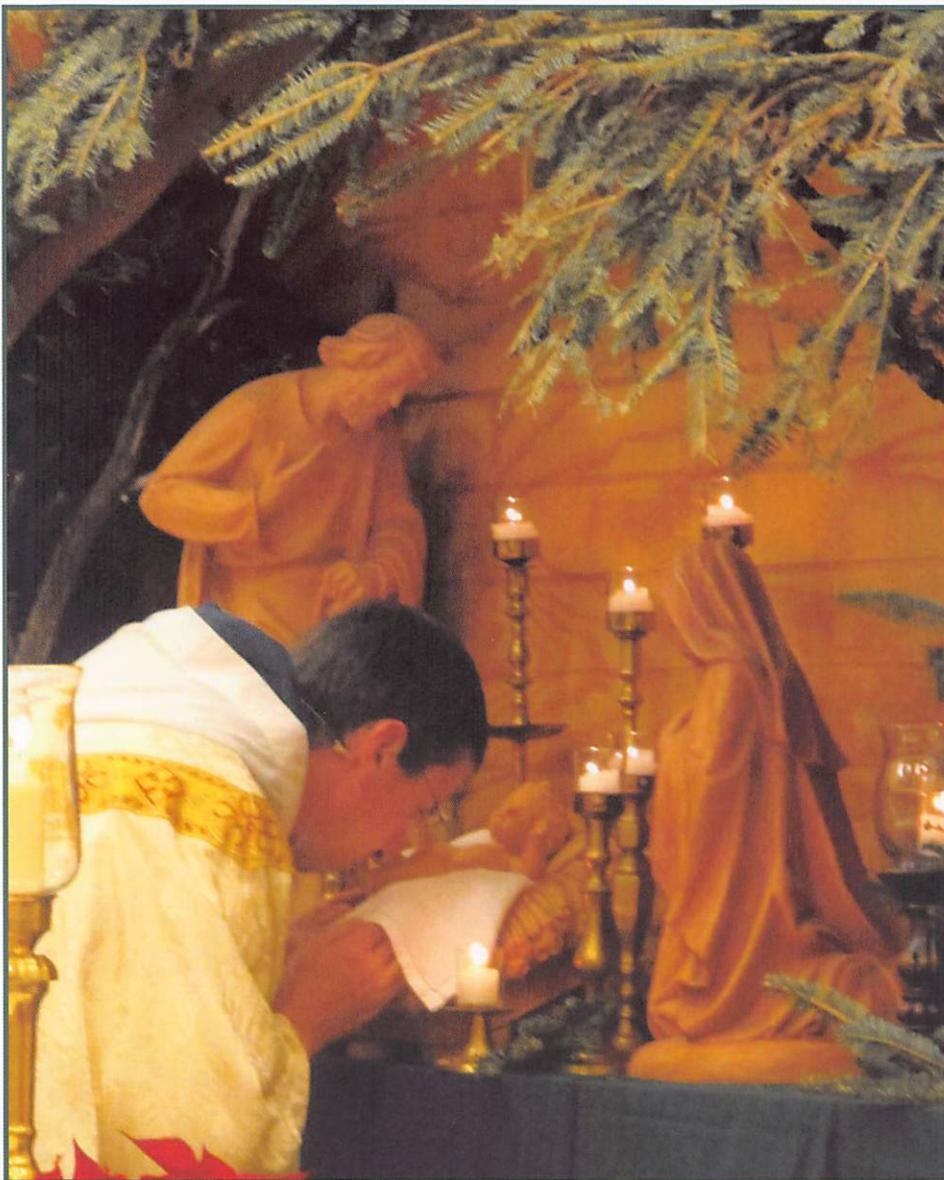


Christmas Novena for all Bethany Associates

Each year the Community offers a very special Christmas gift to all of our Bethany Associates. It is a Christmas Novena of Masses. Beginning Christmas Eve and continuing through New Year's Day, the Community offers each Mass for our Bethany Associates *and their intentions*.

As Mother Magdalene says, "Take all your heartaches, all your desires and intentions, all your most painful and hidden sufferings and place them in the Chalice that the Priest offers to the Eternal Father at each Mass." During the Christmas Novena, the Community is doing this for and with all of our Bethany members.

If you are not yet a member of Bethany, but would like to join this association of friends of the Mission, just check the Bethany box on the enclosed envelope in this newsletter. ♦



Today for our sake
the King of Heaven chose to be born
of His virgin Mother,
to reclaim lost men
for the heavenly Kingdom.
All the angels cry aloud with joy,
for God has come Himself
to save mankind.

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to His people on earth.
All the Angels cry aloud with joy,
for God has come Himself
to save mankind.

(From the Office of Readings for Christmas morning)

A Christmas Experience

One of the women on our September ENCOUNTER wrote about an experience she had waking up early one morning in the dorm:

Everyone was still asleep. In the quietness I went into deep prayer. Suddenly I could smell snow and the scent of evergreen trees. I felt the cold. I had to open my eyes and even said in an audible voice, "Is it snowing outside?" No, the sun was shining through the glass doors. I once again closed my eyes and saw a vision of the Adoration Chapel with the Monstrance exposed.

Around the altar were many Christmas gifts, with beautiful bows, all sizes encircling the altar. The Lord spoke: "It is Christmas every day in the Blessed Sacrament. I have so many gifts to give but no one comes to receive them." ♦



Calendar

DECEMBER

- 8-11 EWJ for Women (English)
- 24 Christmas Eve Vigil
Solemn Mass: 9:00 p.m.
- 25 Christmas Morning (Sunday)
Solemn Mass: 11:00 a.m.
- 31 New Year's Eve
Holy Hour: 9-10:00 p.m.

JANUARY

- 1 Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Solemn Mass (Sunday): 11:00 a.m.
- 12-15 EWJ Women (English)
- 26-19 EWJ Women (Spanish)

FEBRUARY

- 9-12 EWJ Men (English)
- 23-26 EWJ Men (Spanish)

Please visit our website for more information, updates, or to register for an Encounter With Jesus Retreat.

THE URGENT NEED

By David Reed, Executive Director

First, let me give you the short version of our financial situation. In the last few years we have acquired three houses in which the Community members live, and we built the O'Callaghan Center. These additions have doubled the value of our real property assets and we have no remaining long term outstanding debt. That is the good news.

However, on the other hand, it takes a wheelbarrow full of money to staff, maintain and upkeep these assets, along with providing for the Community and activities at the Mission. And the money to fill the wheelbarrow comes strictly from donations. **Bottom line: as our operations grow, our operating needs always outweigh the total donations we receive on a regular monthly basis — by a pretty hefty amount.**

The only reason I can sleep at night, knowing that we have a monthly operating deficit, is because over the five years I've been watching over our financial position, God has always blessed us with a one-time gift, or an unexpected extra donation, just in time to see us through — so far.

For me there is no question that the work that the Community is doing here is God's work, and that it is vital for our world.

But as we look toward 2017, the Mission is looking at a serious monthly deficit.

With each *Encounter With Jesus* retreat, we are gradually increasing our monthly donor base and starting to help narrow the difference, but it is not happening fast enough.

We are looking at all aspects of our operations, and taking what cost-cutting measures that we can, but we also need to appeal to you.

THE URGENT NEED

Could you help?

(Please see the enclosed the envelope!)

- One time gifts — small, large or Out-of-the-Blue Providential — are gratefully received.
- Monthly Gifts — If you are not already supporting us with a monthly gift, would you consider doing so?
- Increasing Your Support — If you already support us, would you consider increasing your donation?

With God's timeliness in providing for our needs, and through the many donors and volunteers we are blessed to know, I have come to realize more the meaning of those words:

"Jesus, I trust in You."

NOVEMBER 12: Just as we are about to go to print we have received word of a special challenge.... →



*The Mission will Receive
a One-Time Gift
of \$20,000...*

As we are about to go to print we received word of a special challenge. Hearing of our urgent financial needs, a friend stepped forward, pledging a **one-time gift of \$20,000** if we can increase our monthly donations by **\$20,000 new dollars** by the end of February 2017.

To try to make this clear:

If you are already giving \$100 per month and decide to increase your gift to \$200 per month, then \$100 goes toward our goal of a new \$20,000 per month.

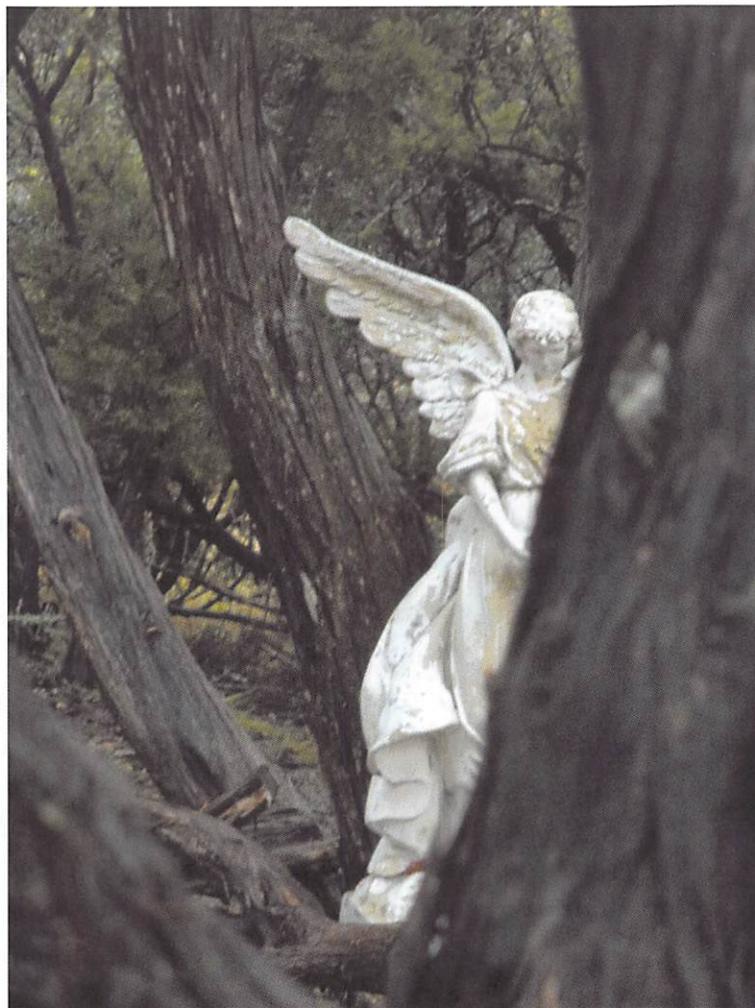
If you are already giving \$50 per month and decide to increase to \$75 per month, then \$25 goes toward our goal of \$20,000 of new money.

If you already give weekly gifts of \$30 per week and increase your gift to \$35 then \$20 (4 x \$5) goes toward our goal of \$20,000 new funds per month.

If you have not made regular donations, and would like to begin regular monthly donations of \$100 dollars, then \$100 goes toward the goal of \$20,000 new funds per month.

THINK ABOUT THIS: 200 people giving an extra \$100 per month = \$20,000 per month in new funds!

Because this challenge came in as we are set to print this newsletter, there was not time to make any special pledge card, or changes to our mailing envelope. If you use the enclosed envelope to begin or increase a monthly pledge, you may want to indicate the change on the envelope. ♦



NEW SGI MEMBER

This fall we welcomed a cousin of ours, **Bill Roderique**, into the St. Gabriel's Institute for a year of religious formation and personal discernment.

Born in 1960, Bill had felt drawn as a boy to consider a consecrated vocation, and had even spent his freshman year at a high school seminary. But the popular culture of the day proved far more appealing. Bill left after that year, graduated from the local high school, and then joined the Navy where he became a nuclear power machinist's mate and studied computer science.

His career since then has centered around software development, design, and management.

In his early fifties, with his marriage being annulled and with two grown daughters, Bill sought the Lord's guidance with regard to the direction for his life. The new charismatic prayer group that was starting at his Parish became a powerful source of grace and support for him. And then while visiting at the Mission last spring he experienced clear signs that the Lord was calling him here, at least for the immediate future.

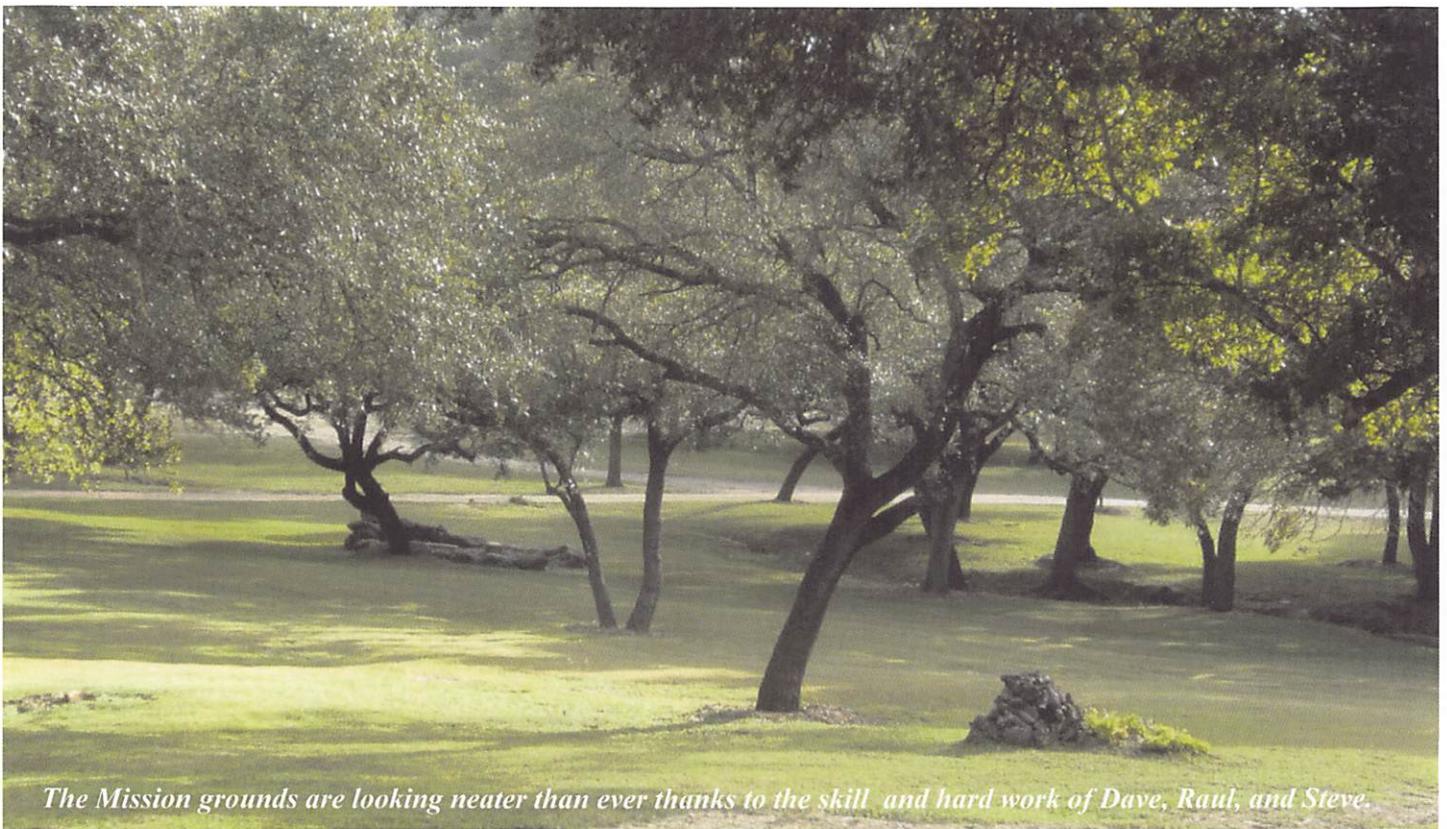
"The Holy Spirit made me do it." (Bill would be happy to share his personal witness in more detail with anyone who is interested.)

The adjustment to the discipline of religious formation can be daunting at any age. It can be even more so at mid-life. But there are also strengths and graces that one brings to bear at that age on the challenges of a consecrated vocation.

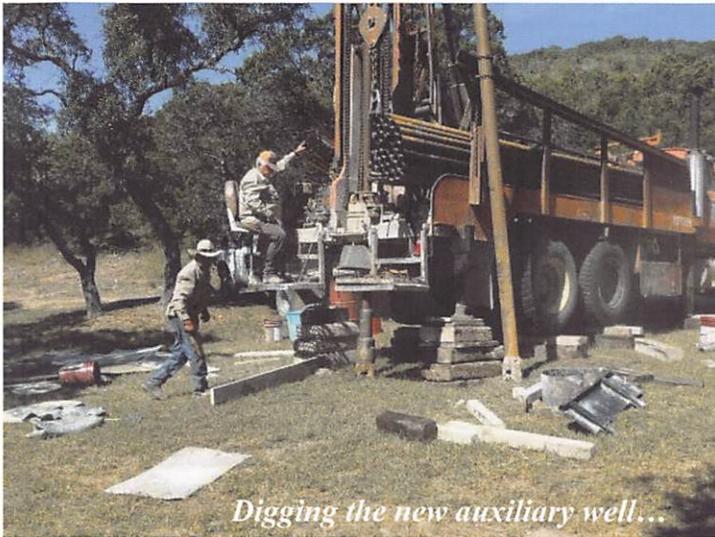
We're glad to have him and ask you to keep him in your prayers.







The Mission grounds are looking neater than ever thanks to the skill and hard work of Dave, Raul, and Steve.



Digging the new auxiliary well...



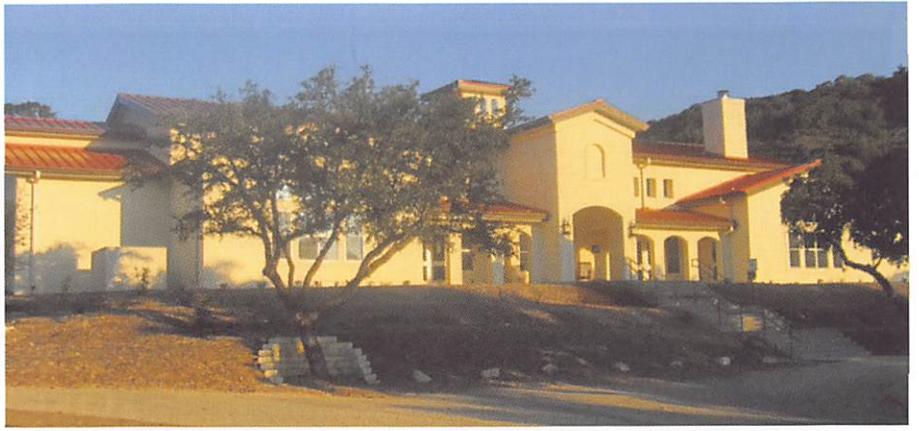
Water!!

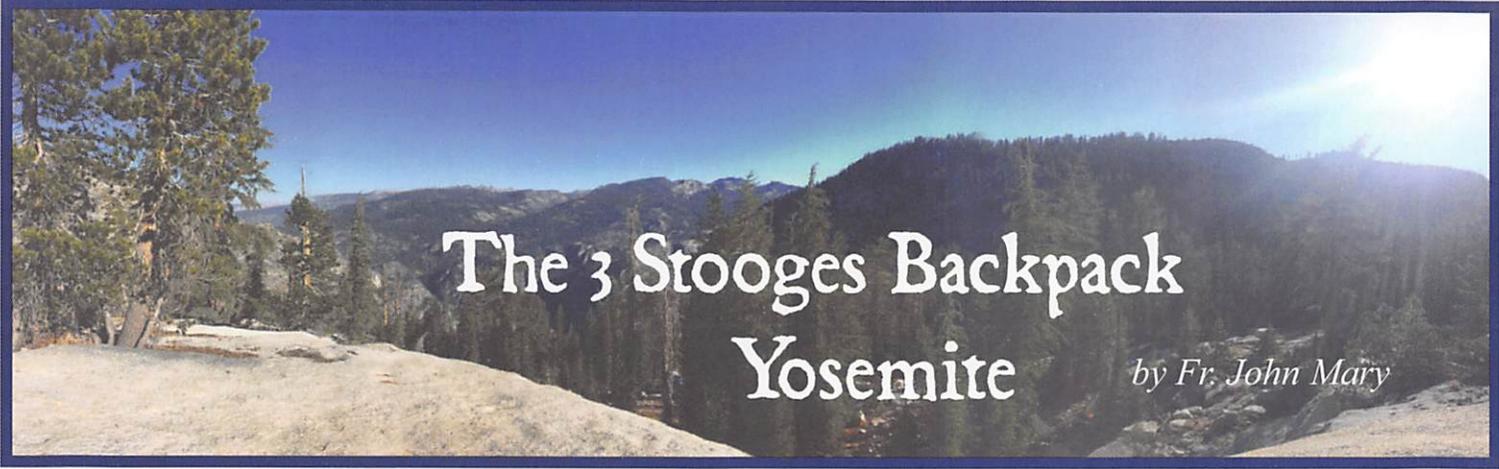
OUR NEW PEWS

On a recent Sunday morning when, due to an EWJ retreat, our Chapel was almost filled to overflowing, we gave thanks once again for our new pews. These new pews — simple, sturdy and handsome — now welcome all the people who enter St. Joseph's Chapel, many for the first time.

To each of you who donated one of the pews, thank you! We couldn't have done it without you. And don't forget about the percentage of prayer said in those pews that comes back to you ☺ — it has only just begun! ♦







The 3 Stooges Backpack Yosemite

by Fr. John Mary

Ok, we weren't quite that bad, but I did prepare for the trip by reading "THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO BACKPACKING." So let's just say we're not highly experienced backpackers. And despite the fact that we had watched several "CLEVER HIKER" videos, we still had quite a few "learning experiences."

I am referring to the trip to Yosemite National Park that the two Brothers and I took this fall. It was a retreat/vacation/ministry/wilderness training all rolled into one. In my

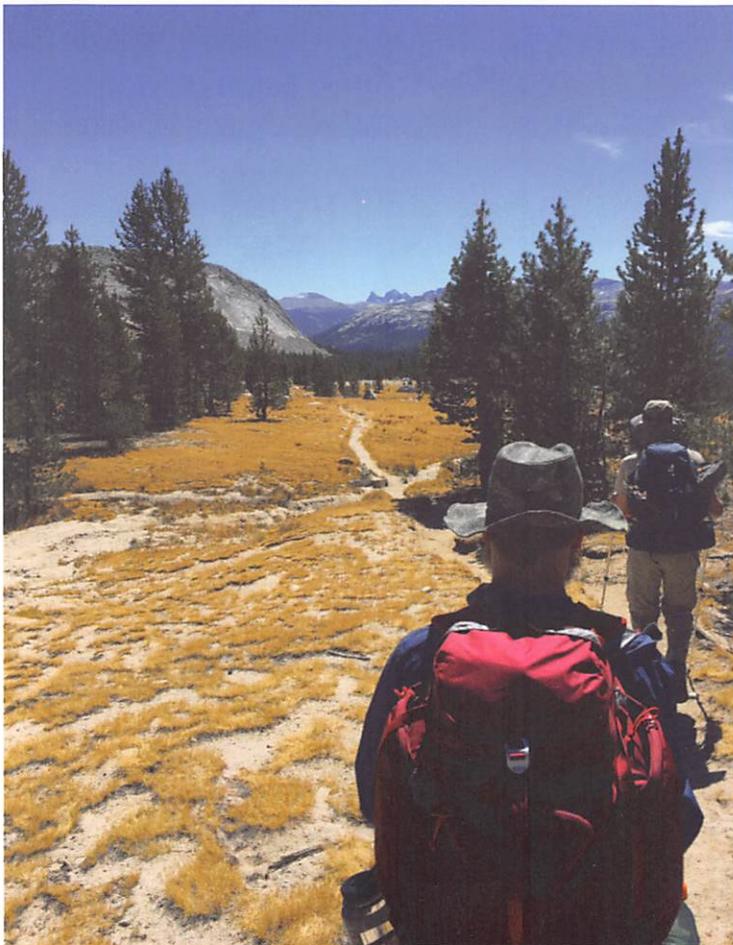
15 years here at the Mission, besides visits with the family, I had really only made one other trip, our community trip to the hermitage in Oregon several years ago.

Br. Mikael was the motor for this trip. He felt we needed a break, but it needed to meet our exacting criteria — the first of which was cheap! It also needed to be restful, spiritually restorative and offer attractive natural surroundings where three monks could hang out without causing too much of a sensation. Then he remembered Yosemite.

We had learned about this opportunity thanks to our friend Jeff Moore. It's an unusual situation. There is a Catholic parish in the park, made up of a very small local community and then some of the millions of visitors who come each year. The parish lost their pastor some years ago. So in order to survive they invite priests to come say the Sunday Mass in exchange for free accommodations in the little rectory in the middle of the park. It is an inexpensive way to experience the wonder of Yosemite.

Travel was the biggest expense, but because some generous donors spontaneously stepped forward, it didn't cost the Mission anything, which was important for our cash-strapped community.

Yosemite is a special place, and it was all that we needed it to be. One person we met told us, "I've experienced all the major national parks. But Yosemite is where there is the strongest spiritual sense." We heard a lot of

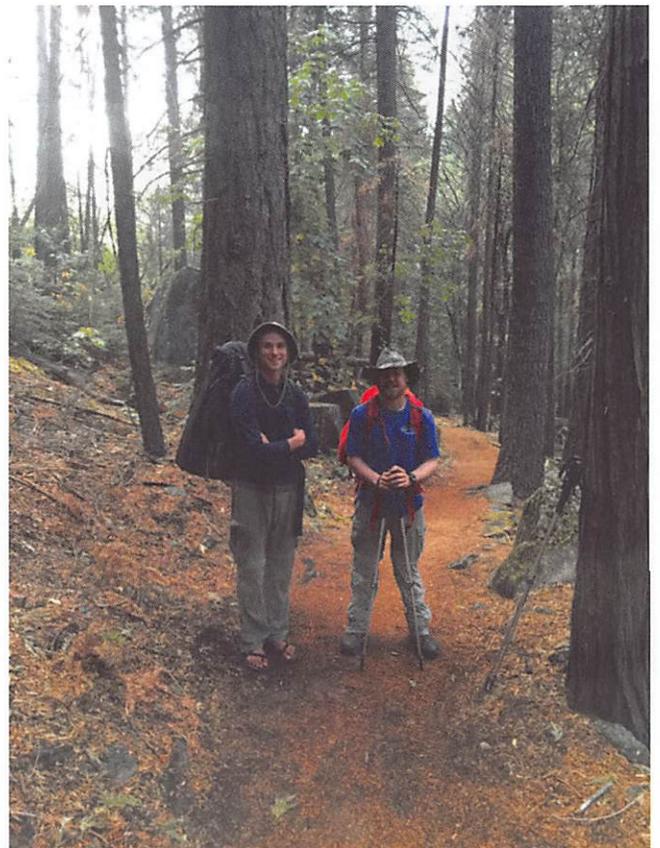




similar comments on our recent trip there. We were able to stay for almost two weeks and during that time we took two backpacking trips into the back country, places you can only reach on foot.

I remember the advice I received about the most effective bear protection: Always keep a person between you and the bear....

Our first backpacking adventure was a simple overnight trip to a beautiful lake location, high in the mountains. But we learned shortly before we left that you aren't allowed to make a campfire after you pass a certain elevation, because of the fire conditions. That night after a cold supper, with snowflakes blowing around us, we crawled into our sleeping bags and hoped that morning would come quickly. At 2 AM with the temperature hovering at 20 degrees, I was lying awake, wondering "Now why did we decide to do this...?"



That was one of those learning experiences that I mentioned.

But the next morning, as the sun rose on the mountains, and we were celebrating Mass on a big rock near the lake, asking the Lord's blessing on all this majestic site, my question was answered.

The only other person in the area, a very experienced camper in his seventies, had witnessed our comical efforts at putting up the tarp on our first night, and came over to check on us that evening. He saw my Rosary and said that he had just said his rosary! We invited him to join us for Mass the next morning, which he did. Maybe he just wanted to check and see if we were still alive, but after Mass he said, "That's the most beautiful Mass I've ever experienced."

Br. Mikael was responsible for planning our entire trip. He did a truly tremendous job of planning it, getting all the equipment, making all the arrangements and carrying the heaviest load, figuratively but also literally as we were backpacking. Thank you, again, Brother! Br. Daniel, who celebrated a birthday during our trip, was an edifying example of patience, humility and perseverance throughout the ups and downs of backpacking. I contributed what I'm good at: grumpiness.

The whole backpacking experience is powerfully formative, in particular for young men [which some of us, ahem, no longer are...]. Many lessons to be learned. The seriousness of those lessons were made clear on our trip to the mountain lake. The search and rescue team came by asking about a man, an experienced and healthy hiker, who had been



missing for a week.... A prayer intention.

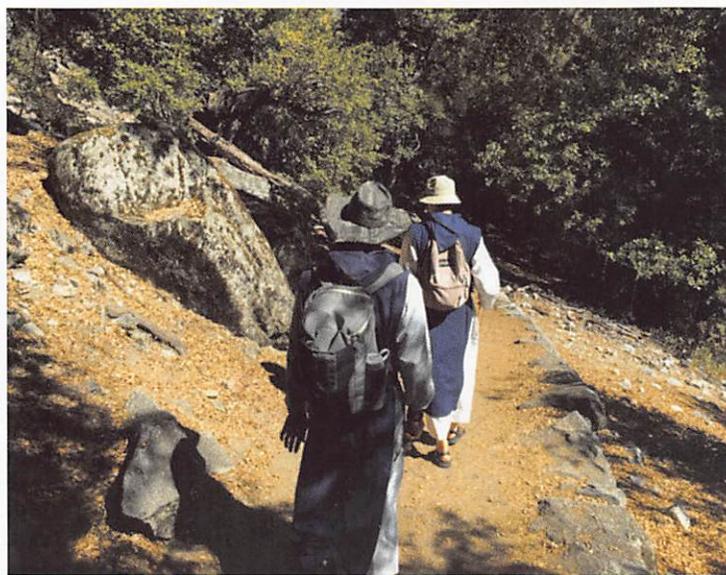
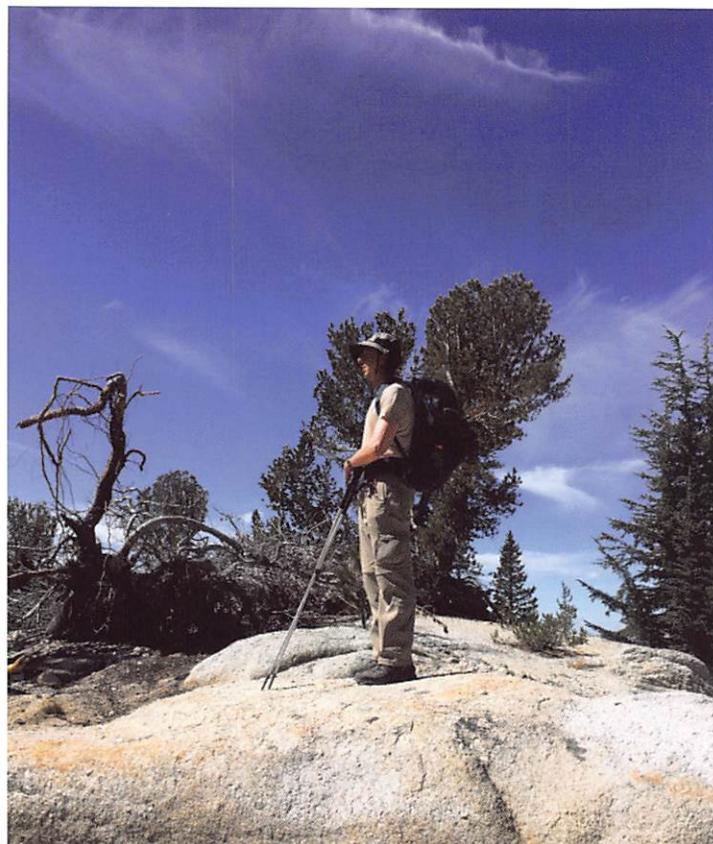
At the end of our second backpacking trip, which was for two nights, we met a young couple carrying very heavy looking packs. He had forgotten his sleeping bag. She was carrying a 6-foot didgeridoo (a musical instrument used by the aborigines). It was their first backpacking trip. They made *us* feel experienced.

The local parishioners, Dave, Dolores and the others, received us with a warmth that blessed us. Just one example: when we returned from three days hiking in the mountains, where we lived on a lot of peanut butter, oatmeal and raisins — cooking wasn't our strong suit — Dolores brought over a delicious pot roast, and a luscious dessert. One of the most welcome meals I'd ever eaten!

Thanks be to God, the three stooges returned safe. The trip was very blessed. Thank you, Lord! We only regretted that the Sisters couldn't come.

One more thing. There's a river running through Yosemite. It's name: the Merced River.

That's Spanish for "the River of Mercy".... ♦

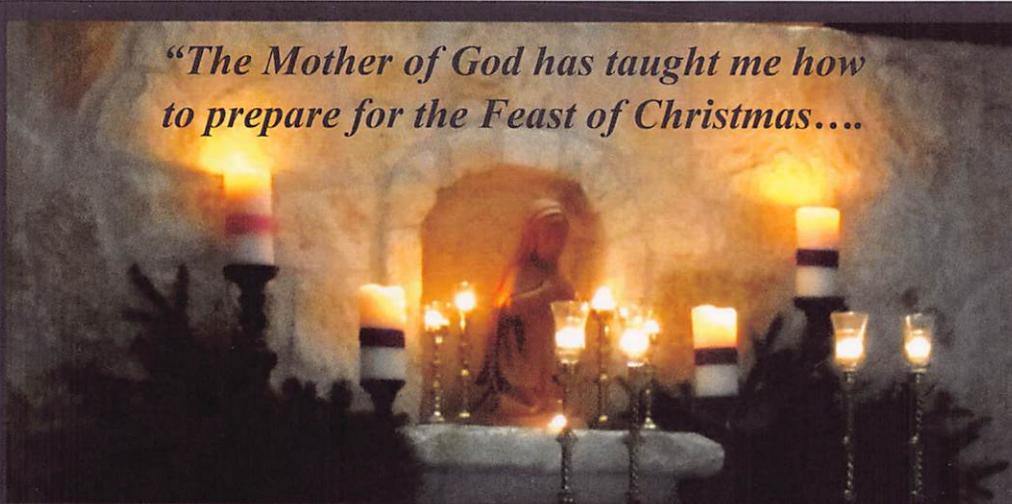




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“The Mother of God has taught me how to prepare for the Feast of Christmas....”

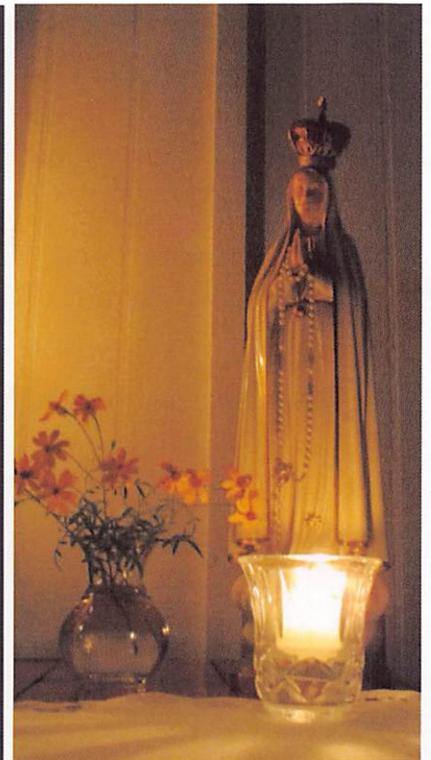


...She said to me: ‘My daughter, strive after silence and humility, so that Jesus, Who dwells in your heart continuously, may be able to rest. Adore Him in your heart, do not go out from your inmost being....’

‘I shall obtain for you the grace of an interior life which will be such that, without ever leaving that interior life, you will be able to carry out all your external duties with even greater care. Dwell with Him continuously in your heart. He will be your strength....’

‘Try to act this way until Christmas Day, and then He Himself will make known to you in what way He will be communing and uniting yourself to Him.’”

(from the Diary of St. Faustina)



Mission of Divine Mercy - Physical address: 1531 Indian Chief Trail, New Braunfels, Texas 78132
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