The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA
March 2016
I’d like to share a personal memory with you about small mercies. As a child, there was a time when I felt hungry. I understood “being” hungry, but I never “knew hunger,” the kind of hopeless, desperate, gnawing hunger that sees no relief, that knows no mercy.

I grew up in a different era, in a small town whose few industries supported hundreds of families, expanding after the war. These industries were big on promises and short on mercy when contracts came up for renewal every 2 years. Every working family knew that at contract renewal time, the plants would shut down from June through October and sometimes on into Christmas. The workers’ unions negotiated while the families manned the strike lines. Those were the hungry months. But our families also knew that they would be supported by the dairy union drivers who dropped off hundreds of gallons of milk, the bread truck drivers who stacked the tables every morning at the strike site, the bankers who understood that the mortgages would be paid when the workers got back to work. No family went without a meal, even a simple one, no one felt the threat of losing their home because of the mercies of so many unknown benefactors.

Times are very different now. Who drives “the relief trucks” for the growing population of the needy, homeless, out of work and disabled? Do we even know our own neighbors or whether they are in trouble? In Savannah, Garden City, Pooler, Bloomingdale and all the little bedroom communities around us, there are few resources but increasing needs and no bread and dairy truck drivers to rescue these families. That duty falls to us and the systems in place, like the Social Apostolate on Liberty Street.

In 2015, 17,176 meals were served from the Social Apostolate soup kitchen, 1,440 families received grocery boxes; 223 babies were given essentials; 1,433 homeless were provided hygiene packs and showers; 956 needy were given clothing. The Social Apostolate has become the neighbor who props up families and provides relief, a chance to get through a rough time and in many cases, to move out of poverty and into the mainstream. Every weekday, those who “know hunger” are fed, showered, given assistance and education and hope at this place of great mercies.

Most of us want to honor Pope Francis’ Year of Mercy in some way. In our parishes, food drives are a simple but essential way to show basic mercy. It’s the food that the Savannah parishes donate which allows Sr. Julie Franchi, the Director, to keep the doors open and serve the many homeless, hopeless and needy around us.

Every March, the Cathedral Parish holds its Annual Food Drive to help the Social Apostolate. Baskets will be set up at the entry doors of the Cathedral to accept donations of canned and boxed food items throughout the month. Please bring a bag every week. Instead of giving up something this Lent, maybe “giving” each week to the food drive will be an opportunity to emphasize mercy as a key element in our preparation for Christ’s coming at Easter. All donations are delivered promptly to the Social Apostolate so your food will make an immediate difference in the lives of your fellow man.

If you want to become even more involved or want to hear more about what The Social Apostolate does right here in Savannah, call 912-233-1877 during the week and someone will show you the way to MERCY.
By Peter Paolucci

The Lenten season during the Jubilee Year of Mercy provides all of us with the opportunity to emphasize mercy as a key element in our preparation for Christ’s coming at Easter.

In his message declaring a Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis said, “Dear brothers and sisters, I have thought about how the Church can make clear its mission of being a witness of mercy. It’s a journey that starts with a spiritual conversion. For this reason I have decided to declare an Extraordinary Jubilee that has the mercy of God at its center. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy.”

The biblical passage for the Holy Year’s theme is from Luke Chapter 6 verse 36, in which Jesus tells his disciples, “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.”

“I am convinced” he continued, “that the whole Church will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and making fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and every woman of our time.”

He expanded on the theme in his Lenten Message this year, “Lent is a time of conversion, time to deepen one’s faith, demonstrating and sharing it through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbors in body and spirit. Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, welcoming strangers, offering instruction, giving comfort -- on such things will we be judged.

“Particularly during the Year of Mercy,” he said, “Catholics are called to recognize their own need for God’s mercy, the greatness of God’s love seen in the death and resurrection of Christ and the obligation to assist others by communicating God’s love and mercy through words and deeds.

“Love alone is the answer to that yearning for infinite happiness,” Pope Francis wrote. “It is the only response to the longings that we think we can satisfy with the idols of knowledge, power and riches.

“The danger always remains that by a constant refusal to open the doors of their hearts to Christ who knocks on them in the poor,” he said, “the proud, rich and powerful will end up condemning themselves and plunging into the eternal abyss of solitude which is hell.

“But through acts of mercy and charity, by touching the flesh of the crucified Jesus in the suffering,” he continued, “sinners can receive the gift of realizing that they too are poor and in need.

“In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited. In the spiritual works of mercy — counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer — we touch more directly our own sinfulness.”

In the Christian life, Pope Francis said, “the corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated.”

Pope Francis wants to help Catholics rediscover the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which seemed to have been left on the shelf with dusty old books.

He said, “it was no longer fashionable to preach about the daily actions of believers.

“The works of mercy are a very simple, concrete, direct, alive, daily, easy, accessible-to-all way of living the Jubilee of Mercy,” he said. “The works of mercy describe what we as Christians can actually do every day.”
The Adult Faith Enrichment Group had some help from Father Schreck in convincing his brother, Monsignor Christopher Schreck to return to the Cathedral to present another dynamic lecture. Last year Monsignor Schreck, Rector/President of Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, presented an overview on the Gospel of Mark. This year Msgr. Schreck lectured on the Gospel of Luke. Choosing this topic was no accident. This is the year of Mercy and the Gospel of Luke has also been called the Gospel of Mercy.

Monsignor started the lecture by explaining that when studying the Gospels we can interpret them vertically or horizontally. A vertical study would be to read one complete Gospel followed by the next one until we have read all four. A horizontal reading would require reading sections of all four Gospels side by side on a particular issue. No words are interpreted outside the context of the entire canon or in isolation but rather in the light of the other inspired texts. A horizontal reading is a more revealing way of understanding the material. When considering a Gospel the spiritual and allegorical interpretations cannot contradict the literal interpretation.

Msgr. Schreck went over some of the challenges in studying the Gospel of Luke. The first challenge is just the sheer size of this moving Gospel. It is the longest book in the New Testament. Despite it containing only 24 chapters, four less than both Matthew and Acts, it contains more verses and words. Luke contains 1,151 verses compared to 1,071 found in Matthew and 1,006 found in Acts. Another challenge is comparing it to the other synoptic Gospels and noting the differences. These differences tell you something of value about Luke as an author, physician and man of his time and place in history.

The audience was seriously hooked by the time Msgr. was ready to tell us about Luke, the writer and physician, who also wrote the Book of Acts. Luke was not an eyewitness but rather a second-generation follower of the apostles. He was a devoted friend to Paul and as such, the Gospel of Luke is sometimes called the Pauline Gospel. Luke is a talented writer and was a highly educated man. He was a gentle writing for a Greek speaking audience. Luke was aware of the Hellenistic literary patterns and he looked to the great writers like Herodotus for his style and flavor. He was able to switch his style from the elegantly classical Greek to the more casual commonly spoken Greek when he wanted. Luke is writing around 80-90 AD when the Church was experiencing a period of peace. Msgr. explained that Luke was “making a big pitch to convert the world, starting with Rome.” Remember Jesus was executed as a political criminal, his followers were associated with the destruction of Jerusalem and were considered revolutionaries. Luke wanted to show that Jesus taught virtues that were compatible with good citizenship in the Empire.

We learned a lot more and the audience had a great experience. We are truly grateful that a biblical scholar of Msgr. Schreck’s stature took the time to share his knowledge with us. The talk was enlightening and engaging, complimented by great fellowship and delicious food and drinks. The Adult Faith Enrichment group is currently facilitating the Catholicism program by Bishop Barron. If you are interested in learning about all the activities offered by this group or joining the committee, please contact Norene at NCB-25@att.net.
On a pleasant January weekend, 48 Savannah parishioners, both adults and youth representing seven parishes from all over the Savannah area, traveled by bus and car to historical St. Augustine, Florida for their 10th annual March for Life.

Activities there began on Friday night, January 15th, with a Holy Hour at Our Lady of La Leche Church, followed by Mass, an Illuminated Living Rosary under the great cross erected on the church property, and dinner. Some of our own deanery youth, Hanna Suddath and Ellie Lehto, provided entertainment at the dinner.

The Shrine and Church of Our Lady of La Leche stands on a famous historical site, the first mission in the United States of America, dating back to 1565. In the 1600’s, Spanish settlers established the first Shrine to Our Lady in the U.S. on the same property and the present chapel, built in 1915, remains a “comforting place to pray for mothers-to-be and families”

On Saturday morning, the church was overflowing for Mass at nine. Following an informational gathering featuring comments by Bishop Felipe J. Estevez of the Diocese of St. Augustine, live speakers and opportunities to interact with many pro-life agencies and organizations, the March for Life began around eleven. It was an inspiring sight, with an impressive contingent of youth and families participating from all over Florida and many from Georgia as well. About 3,000 people processed peacefully to the center of the old city of St. Augustine to the Basilica to hear the Keynote Speaker, Leah Darrow, a former international model turned wife and mom of three children with another on the way.

Leah’s testimony was a story of Mercy. She spent her youth seeking the world first and learning the hard way that our hearts are whole only when we come to know Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. She suffered great indignity and sorrow along the way, before the Lord revealed his love for her and for each person made in His image. Leah said she came to know that each of us is special to God, and each of us has an important role in the world that only we can fill. Leah turned back to Jesus and found not only renewed faith and self-respect, but a new life speaking the truth to a fallen world.

I have never attended the St. Augustine March for Life before, nor did I know that there are now Marches for Life in hundreds of American cities during January every year. All of them have arisen from the desire to affirm God’s grace and the gift of life, for babies in the womb, for families, the poor, the weak, the sick, the disabled, the lonely, the imprisoned and the elderly, all of whom Jesus repeatedly exhorted his followers to love and protect.

This beautiful experience confirms again that the love of God’s people cannot and will not be suppressed by forces counter to the merciful will of Our Heavenly Father.

God’s Mercy Overcomes the Culture of Death

By Gretchen Reese
Photos by Chuck Medlock
There are inscriptions carved in stone throughout the Cathedral—sometimes in Latin—which we may not notice or understand.

By Peter Paolucci — Photos from Art and Symbols book

Baptismal Font
When we enter the Cathedral it’s hard to miss the Baptismal font which weighs 8,000 pounds and is in the shape of an octagon. The number eight represents rebirth or resurrection which is the essence of the Sacrament of Baptism. The Latin inscription “Qui misit me baptizare in aqua, hic est qui baptizat in Spiritu Sancto”, which winds around the font, translates to “He who sent me to baptize with water, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” The text comes from John 1:3.

Main Altar
On the front of the Cathedral’s main altar is the Latin phrase “Beati Qui Ad Cenam Agni Vocati Sunt,” which translates to “Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the Lamb” and is from the Book of Revelation 19:9. On the opposite side, at the base of the altar, is the inscription “GIFT OF THE BISHOP AND THE PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF SAVANNAH A.D. 2000.”
Sacred Heart Shrine
The Sacred Heart Shrine reflects Gothic design elements like those found on the main altar and the reredos. The letters “SH” carved at the base of the altar indicates that is is dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The inscription “From His Priests to the Great High Priest”, on the base of the Shrine, commemorates the generosity of the priests and bishops from throughout the United States, who in response to Bishop Becker’s appeal, donated funds to rebuild the Cathedral after the fire of 1898.

Ambry
On top the ambry in the north transept stands a statue of Saint Joseph holding the Child Jesus. The letters “SJ” carved at the base of the ambry indicates that this was formerly the Saint Joseph altar. The inscription reads, “IN MEMORY OF MARGARET, Daughter of Henry & Katherine Blun.”

St. Anthony Shrine
The St. Anthony shrine is located in the south transept. Its most outstanding feature is the traditional-styled crucifix, carved in Italy which replaced the tabernacle that was relocated to the north transept to construct the ambry. At the base of the shrine is a carving of the letters “SA” which stands for Saint Anthony and the inscription “In Memory of Archbishop Gross.”

Blessed Virgin Mary Shrine
At the center of the Marian Shrine, where the tabernacle used to be, (incorporated into the ambry), is a carving of the Miraculous Medal which was taken from the altar in the lower chapel of the Cathedral during the 1999-2000 renovation. The stars reflect the 12 apostles and thus represent the entire church. The cross stands above a straight line which symbolizes the earth. The interwoven cross, earth, and letter “M” reflect the intertwined nature of Mary, an earthly mother to her divine son, Jesus. The two hearts stand for the love of Jesus and Mary for all people.

On the bottom of the altar are carved interwoven letters “AM” which stand for “Ave Maria”, the Latin translation for Gabriel’s greeting to Mary at the Annunciation. The shrine, donated by the Sisters and children of Saint Mary’s home, stands in honor of Father Cafferty who died May 14, 1896.

Look for them when you are next in the Cathedral.
If the phrase “Let the force be with you,” brings to mind Star Wars then you need to meet the Cathedral’s new Prayer Club members. They are using the real “force” to spread the love of God deeper into our community. Prayer is the most powerful “force” or tool we have to grow closer to God, thank God, ask for help, intercede on the behalf of others, and to actively adore God.

The group’s leader, Glenda Sanders, and her team already have three new ways for you to get involved. First, we pray for those who have requested prayers by name, daily and devoutly. A prayer request box and form are in the narthex of the Cathedral so please let us know how we can pray for you. If you are requesting prayers for another person please consider their privacy and obtain permission from them, or use only their initials on the form. The prayer club also has a group that meets Thursday nights at 6:00 in the Parish Hall library room to pray together. We focus on the Sunday readings and Gospel and discuss how to integrate their themes into our daily lives. Other members of the prayer group participate in the Friday Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for the Year of Mercy. Everyone is welcome to pray at the chairs set up on the altar in front of the Blessed Sacrament at any time between 8 am and 5 pm for any length of time.

The main goal of praying is to align our wills with the will of God. The bible has hundreds of examples that prove the power of prayer in gaining wisdom, increasing faith and changing hearts (James 1:1-5), bringing healing (2 Kings 6:17-18), gaining prosperity (1 Chronicles 4:10), receiving direction (1 Samuel 23:10-13), improving confidence (Acts 4:29-30), victory in battle (2 Chronicles 13:4) and too many more to list. There is nothing too small or too big to pray about. The power of prayer does not reside in the people praying, but is the result of the power of God. Prayer is not some flimsy wish, trick of magic, or simple positive thinking. It is as real as electricity only infinitely more powerful. It is a force to be taken seriously, which can never be depleted and is free for the taking. Divine power is a force that will not be defeated, and the glory of God is not to be underestimated. Being part of a prayer group is a powerful way to join in God’s love and mercy.

Prayer creates change, starting with the one who prays. If you are hoping to help solve serious problems, cure illnesses, heal relationships, deepen your faith, grow closer to God, and generally be a powerful force for good then consider joining the Cathedral Prayer Group. These parishioners recently formed as a result of the Stewardship Piece of the Pie Talent Search and have a very diverse group of members who are looking forward to meeting you. Everyone is most welcome. Please contact Glenda at Sandersgks53@aol.com for information about how to participate.
The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is known for being the “Sistine of the South” for good reason. It’s filled with elaborate stained glass, tall marble-like columns, and a presence that takes your breath away. One of the most important features of the Cathedral is the church’s 34 murals.

The murals, which are actually oil on canvas paintings, were transferred to the church walls back in 1912. The murals have gone through a lot over the years, but with proper preservation and care, they’re still quite clear to see.

Tours of the Cathedral and its murals take place daily. To make the most out of mural viewing, pay close attention to the following features.

Each mural has an important saint or figure, but instead of focusing only on the facial features, take a closer look at the details. Many saints are holding items like palm leaves, keys, and body parts — symbolizing different themes, deaths, and biblical stories. Not sure what a particular item symbolizes? Ask a Cathedral tour guide — they’re very knowledgeable about mural facts and trivia.

Saint Dennis of France is headless — but you can see him holding his head in his hands. People didn’t like the way he was preaching, so they cut off his head. Rumor has it that he picked it up and kept, walking and talking.

Saint Lucy is depicted with her eyes shut — because she is holding her eyeballs on a plate. Saint Lucy was a martyr, and her eyeballs were gouged out prior to her execution.

Saint Isaac Jogues was the first North American martyr. He was ministering to the Native Americans in New York and southern Canada, and was captured by the Mohawk tribe and killed. It’s not often that you’ll see a person dressed in Native American garments in a Catholic church, which is what makes this mural especially interesting.

Tours of the Cathedral are free, but donations for upkeep and art preservation are most welcomed. To read the article, type this URL (without spaces) into your browser: http://blog.visitsavannah.com/uncategorized/cathedral-st-john-the-baptist/

In addition to the video, Larissa Allen wrote the following article entitled HIDDEN DETAILS INSIDE THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST which appears on their Facebook page. It can also be found in the Savannah Secrets feature section under the Arts and Culture tab and will be promoted on other social media channels in the coming days.
The Cathedral’s Adult Faith Enrichment Team, formed by Norene Buckstine, started the 2016 year off with a significant project that has been a huge success. The team wanted to respond quickly to the call parishioners made during the Fall Ministry Fair for programs that would teach and deepen their faith. Approximately 75 people signed up to participate in Catholicism, the highly lauded documentary film and study program hosted by Bishop Robert Barron. This program has been ranked number one by many Catholic organizations and websites for presenting the “truth, goodness and beauty of the Catholic faith.”

The demand to participate was larger than expected so the team offered both an evening and a morning session. The program will continue for several months as the participants work through ten, 50 minute DVD lessons that guide them to over 50 locations across the globe and into 15 countries. Bishop Barron spent over four years creating this cinematic and engaging program that has gained so much popularity it has been shown as a mini-series on PBS and is utilized in thousands of parishes across the country and abroad.

According to Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop, Emeritus of Chicago, Bishop Barron “is one of the Catholic Church’s best messengers.” He is founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles and is the one of, if not the most, popular Catholic personalities in the arena of social media. He is a prominent theologian, author, speaker and cultural commentator. He received a Master’s Degree in Philosophy from the Catholic University of America (1982) and a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Institut Cathlique de Paris (1992). His website, WordonFire.org, has reached nearly 4 million people and his weekly YouTube videos have been viewed over nine million times. The Adult Faith Enrichment Team is very excited and proud to be sharing his work so that our parishioners can witness a vision of the Catholic Faith in a stunning and engaging format.

While Bishop Barron is incredibly popular on blogs, Youtube and Facebook, don’t assume he offers “Catholic-Lite” or some sort of fast, fun, watered-down version of the faith, easy for the public to handle. His program is deep, devout and demanding and completely aligned with the official views of the Church. His programs offer both the Biblical and Catechism notation for each lesson. After watching the DVD lessons participants are divided into small groups for discussions that further deepen their understanding and offer ways to apply the lesson in their everyday thinking and living. These discussions are part of the learning process and many participants have mentioned that learning from one another has been a real value.

As the website says, the content of this program showcases how our Church’s “influence on humanity has created a truly global culture, spotlights the artistic and architectural splendor of the faith interpreted in the light of the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ, teaches precisely what the church believes and why and touches hearts, illumines mind and stirs the soul.” This program is a wonderful offering to deepen our Lenten experience. For more information on this program or to join the Adult Faith Enrichment team and help us bring new programs to the Cathedral, please contact Norene at ncb-25@att.net. We would love to have your help with the next program!
Ten years ago saw we offered the first of what has evolved into a series of ornaments featuring the windows of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

 Appropriately the first of the series of ornaments sold in 2007 featured the center window above the altar depicting John baptizing Christ. That brings us to the ornament for 2016, St. George and the Dragon. It is only fitting that St. George be depicted in one of the Cathedral windows. He is the Patron Saint of England and Georgia was an English Colony. The allegory of St. George slaying the dragon is a story of good triumphing over evil.

The art department of ChemArt, Lincoln, RI derived the geometric pattern for the ornament’s frame from the design in St. George’s red belt.

The ornaments are a major on-going fund raiser for Cathedral expenses. They can be purchased at the reception desk in the rear of the church or ordered from our website: savannahcathedral.org. Currently all years are in stock but so as not to be disappointed when December 2016 rolls around, you should shop early. The ornaments are $20 apiece.

Who was St. George?

George was born to a Roman officer and a Greek native of Lydda in the late 3rd Century. Both were Christians from noble families and George was raised to follow their faith. When George was old enough, he was welcomed into Diocletian’s army and by his late 20’s became a Tribune and served as an imperial guard for the Emperor at Nicomedia.

In 303 A.D., Diocletian, who hated Christians, announced that every Christian the army passed would be arrested and every other soldier should offer a sacrifice to the Roman gods. George refused to abide by the order and ultimately Diocletian ordered George’s execution.

On April 23, 303 A.D., George was decapitated before Nicomedia’s outer wall. His body was sent to Lydda for burial, and other Christians went to honor George as a martyr.

Interesting facts about St. George

Saint George stands out among other saints and legends because he is known and revered by both Muslims and Christians.

It is said Saint George killed the dragon near the sea in Beirut, thus Saint George Bay was named in his honor.

As George is the Patron Saint of England, his Cross is on the flag of Great Britain and can be found displayed in a variety of ways throughout the country.

Saint George is depicted wearing armor and holding a lance or fighting a dragon, which represents Christ’s enemies.
Booklet Sales Benefit Murals Preservation Fund

The response to the recent Twin Spires “Sistine of the South” issue has been so overwhelming that we have expanded it into a 32 page booklet to do justice to all of these outstanding murals and liturgical symbols which are among Savannah’s greatest treasures.

In 1911, Bishop Benjamin Keiley commissioned Christopher Murphy, a Cathedral parishioner and noted Savannah artist, to conceptualize and implement a program of mural decoration for the Cathedral. Murphy personally planned and directed the mural development and placement.

He commissioned Paul Gutsche, an artist who had worked on the Library of Congress project, to execute the paintings for the Cathedral. These renaissance style pieces were painted in oil on canvas in Gutsche’s studio in Greenwich Village and later installed in the Cathedral, much like you would put up wallpaper, for the formal reopening on Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 1912. The newspaper headline at the time proclaimed: “Famous Paintings Adorn Cathedral.”

The story continued, “Resplendent in its beauty, created by the touch of artistic genius, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is again ready to be occupied for the honor and glory of God.”

This booklet will serve as a wonderful keepsake for sharing the Cathedral’s beauty with family and friends or be a unique gift for any special occasion. The books are on sale at the docent’s desk in the rear of the Cathedral or in the Cathedral office for $10.00 each. Proceeds will be dedicated to the Murals Preservation Fund.