The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA
March 2015
You get a pleading email. You see dirty, hungry-eyed children in a television ad. You are bombarded outside of WalMart with charities you’ve never heard of. Money is tight but your heart tells you, “I want to give. I’ve got so much more than those folks.” Your head asks, “But how do I know if those causes are legitimate, real, being used for the truly needy?”

The March Food Drive for the Social Apostolate is very real and truly helps the needy!

Take a moment to look at a few numbers from the year-end report provided by Sr. Julie at Savannah’s Social Apostolate and decide if the MARCH FOOD DRIVE answers those questions for you. In 2014, the Social Apostolate served 17,392 meals and provided groceries for 886 households. That is in addition to showers for 1,236 homeless, clothing for 340 and hygiene packets for 476 individuals. Plus baby needs for 163 mothers, prescriptions for 274, and eye exams for 199 needy persons right here in Savannah.

You need look no further than Liberty Street to see where your food donations to the March Food Drive will be put to use at the Social Apostolate.

Each March, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is responsible for helping Sr. Julie fill the shelves of the Food Bank and the Soup Kitchen with canned and boxed food items so that she can continue to care for those who have fallen on hard times or who need to feel the dignity of basic human hygiene and care. To qualify for grocery assistance, clients must provide a photo ID and some form of verification that they are residents. Showers, soup kitchen meals and emergency assistance are provided on a “walk-in” basis.

Items most needed to maintain these services include non-perishables such as: canned meats, fish, vegetables, and fruit, pasta, spaghetti sauce, hearty soups, peanut butter, jelly, boxed dinners, rice, dried beans, cereals even small containers of vegetable oil.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that we are the Church. “The Church not only prays, ‘give us this day our daily bread,’ but must work ‘to multiply the five loaves and two fish’ by sharing so that no one goes without the necessities of life. The Gospels forbid us to be indifferent to poverty, to the hungry among us. It is not only a challenge, it is a moral obligation.”

And Pope Francis asks us to serve God “concretely.” Recently Pope Francis is reported to have slipped out into the streets of Rome, dressed like a priest, taking with him bread and fruit, sitting with the homeless, sharing in common bread and conversation with them.

Donating to the March Food Drive might fall short of Pope Francis’s very personal “concrete” method of feeding the poor, but it is a very practical way to “multiply our loaves and fishes” on our own streets. If you are seeking a means to help others in a “concrete way” or maybe you wonder what to “give up” for Lent, the March Food Drive is a convenient, anonymous, tangible way to do both.

Throughout the month of March, boxes will be available at the side entrances of the Cathedral for you to drop off your food items. The donated food is delivered each week to the Social Apostolate by Christian Service Committee volunteers. That’s how simple it is. And you get the answer to your very responsible question, “Is this really going to the needy?” Yes, and immediately! Instead of giving up something this Lent, maybe “giving” each week to the food drive will be a more personal way to feel that you are living up to Christ’s expectation that we be our brother’s keeper, right here in Savannah.
Perhaps no other teaching of Our Lord is more difficult to embrace than His emphatic insistence of self-denial. In a culture that confidently asserts the very opposite principle, embracing the season of Lent seems to be all the more pressing for us. It seems we naturally spend some degree of effort to avoid discomfort. But we are gently urged by the Church to contemplate the meaning and necessity of the Lenten season.

St. John records Our Lord countering the human inclination to avoid discomfort by using an analogy in nature: “Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit,” (12:24). Although this doesn’t solve for us the mystery of suffering and Death, it helps in a small way to understand there is a purpose behind what seems to be the madness of the Cross. During Lent we are asked to deny ourselves — to die to ourselves in a small way. It seems, we are told, we cannot fulfill our ultimate purpose without this kind of submission.

Drawing from his personal experience, a Jesuit priest, Fr. Robert Spitzer, confessed that his own suffering directly contributed to a sense of purpose in life. He wrote: “Often I have contented myself with an incredibly superficial view of life’s meaning … and incredibly superficial views of human beings … during the “good” times. It was only when I was challenged by real suffering that I began to ask more probative questions, to search for deeper purpose in life, and to let go of what was then manifestly superficial (underlining my life). These moments of suffering led me to the discovery of love as the purpose of life.”

Human beings naturally place a certain value on personal comfort and convenience. When we willingly deprive ourselves of these we demonstrate that something else has greater value. In so many words, Fr. Spitzer seems to suggest our purpose in life involves finding greater value outside our status or material comfort.

Although self-denial naturally leads to discomfort, few fail to recognize that a willingness to deny oneself for the sake of love is perhaps one of the most beautiful expressions of personhood. Therefore, the self-induced mortifications of Lent are valuable because they function as an outlet to express the love in our hearts for God; and they better enable us to recall His own Passion out of His love for us.

Victorian Poet Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins gracefully wrote about how nature itself points to a dimension of beauty in created things that is inaccessible until the thing is broken. In one particular verse he marvels over how “blue-bleak embers” would “gash gold vermillion” when dropped. In his nature poems he expresses how all creation mimicked the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ: days, seasons, seeds, biology and behaviors of certain creatures; they all point to a fall and expectant renewal of creation on the Day of the Lord.

Perhaps then, Lent’s most noteworthy quality is not mortification in itself, but instead its demonstration that the greatest value of a thing will only emerge from its most humble state. St. Paul put it plainly to the Corinthians: “for when I am weak, then I am strong,” (2 Cor. 12:10).
With a feast day of March 19th, St. Joseph rarely gets much attention in Savannah, overshadowed by the extensive St. Patrick’s Day festivities a couple of days before.

In a recent blog posting, Fr. Ed Broom said, “Of all the saints on the Liturgical Calendar, aside from Jesus and Mary, by far the greatest saint is “Glorious Saint Joseph”. He indeed is in a category by himself! Theologians classify Saint Joseph as Protodulia, meaning that among the saints, he is given first place; “Proto” means first! God entrusted St. Joseph with two sublime missions; one mission even greater than the other. First, God called St. Joseph to be the spouse of the Queen of the angels and saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary. God the Father also entrusted St. Joseph with an even more exalted and sublime mission — namely, being the “Foster Father” of the Son of the living God, Jesus, and the Son of the eternal Father.

In an article published in the Arlington Catholic Herald, Fr. William Saunders further details the case for St. Joseph’s greatness very convincingly:


Nevertheless, what this great saint did in his life for God speaks volumes.

St. Joseph was “of the house and lineage of David” (Lk 2:4). Because of this ancestry, St. Joseph is the link between the old covenant made with Abraham and Moses, and the new, perfect and everlasting covenant which will be made through the blood of Jesus.

St. Matthew identifies Joseph as “an upright man.” The original text uses the word “just” or “righteous,” which better reflect that he lived by God’s standard, keeping the commandments and emulating God’s love.

St. Joseph first appears in the infancy narratives of St. Matthew’s Gospel. St. Joseph was engaged to Mary when he discovered that she was pregnant. In Jewish society, when a couple became formally engaged, declaring their intent before two witnesses, they were considered married as husband and wife. After one year usually, the groom went to the home of the bride with great ceremony and took her to his own home where they consummated the marriage and lived together as husband and wife. Since St. Joseph did not yet know God’s plan, but knew his wife was pregnant not by himself, the Gospel reads that he...
“decided to divorce her quietly” (Mt 1:19). According to the Torah laws, St. Joseph could have had Mary stoned to death for infidelity (cf. Dt 22). If St. Joseph knew Mary was pregnant, did the town gossip circle also notice? One can only wonder what shame and hurt he must have felt. How his heart must have been broken.

Nevertheless, the angel of the Lord appeared to St. Joseph in a dream, revealed to him that Mary had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and commanded that he take Mary as his wife and Jesus as his own son. Without question or hesitation, St. Joseph did as the angel commanded. Here again, we see the important role of Joseph: He is to take Jesus as his own son and to name Him, thereby giving Him legal recognition and legal personhood.

St. Joseph fulfilled his obligations courageously. Throughout the Gospel he faithfully and unquestioningly obeyed the commands of God: taking his family to the safety of Egypt to flee the wrath of King Herod; returning to Nazareth; presenting his child in the Temple for circumcision and formal presentation; and traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

He accepted the responsibility of his vocation - being a faithful spouse and father. He provided the best he could for his family, whether that meant the stable in Bethlehem or the home in Nazareth. The Holy Family were people of modest means. When St. Joseph and Mary presented Jesus at the Temple, they offered two turtle doves as a sacrifice, an exception made for poorer families who could not afford the usual offering of a lamb.

To provide for his family, St. Joseph worked as a carpenter. The original word in the Gospel is “tekton,” which means “craftsman” or “artisan,” thereby suggesting that he could have been a builder of homes as well as a carpenter. As a good Jewish father, St. Joseph passed this trade on to his son, and indeed Jesus is known as “the carpenter’s son” (Mt 13:55) and “the carpenter” (Mk 6:3).

Although St. Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus, he was a father in every other sense of the word. Again, as a good Jewish father, he was responsible for the religious education of his son, including teaching Him to read the sacred Scriptures. St. Joseph must have been a fine, masculine example for Jesus considering that God, the Father, had entrusted His Son to his care.

Finally, Jesus must have loved and respected St. Joseph and Mary very much, for the Gospel reads, after the finding in the Temple, Jesus returned to Nazareth and “was obedient to them” (Lk 2:51). In all, he selflessly set aside his own needs for the good of his family.

Editor’s Note:
In 2013, Pope Francis approved a change in the Catholic Mass which inserts the name of Saint Joseph into the texts of Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV of the Roman Missal. The additions, which in English amount to five words, “with blessed Joseph, her spouse,” follow a mention of Mary and are included in three different versions of the prayer. The inclusion of his Name, following the Blessed Mother, emphasizes St. Joseph’s importance among the Saints, as someone who protected Jesus and the Blessed Virgin. As the foster father of Jesus, he fostered the humanity of Jesus, as well as nurtured and helped Christ grow into an adult.

Glorious Saint Joseph, Spouse of Mary and Foster Father of Jesus, the Son of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen!

Fr. William Saunders’ remarks reprinted courtesy of the Arlington Catholic Herald.
Bringing St. Mark’s Gospel to Life

By Norene Buckstine and Moira Novack

As part of an evolving Adult Faith Enrichment program at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Monsignor Christopher Schreck, Rector/President of Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, presented an overview of the Gospel of Mark in a three part lecture series on January 2nd and 3rd. Msgr. Schreck holds an AB in Classical Studies from The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA; an STB from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome; an SSL from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome; and an STD and PhD from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. He is a true Biblical scholar and we were so fortunate and grateful to have him offer these fabulous lectures.

The first lecture began with a discussion on reading Mark with an eye to the distinctivity of the Gospel’s provenance, tradition, and influence. Monsignor described how this gospel is considered a passion narrative with a long introduction. The next day the talks focused on the Gospel’s two great theological themes: Christology and Discipleship. The last lecture dealt with the importance of the disciples to the gospel with Msgr. Schreck asking, “Is it too much to say, No Disciples, No Gospel?”

He offered a synoptic comparison between Matthew, Mark and Luke which challenged readers to look carefully at their differences and similarities. The audience particularly enjoyed examples of Mark’s abruptness and realism. The roar of laughter from the attendees was likely heard outside when Msgr. pointed out the stark and vivid words Mark used to describe the failures and mistakes of the apostles in comparison to the words used by other Gospel writers.

He talked about the mistakes the apostles made, like falling asleep in the garden and how they occasionally needed to be reproached for their lack of faith even after personally witnessing Jesus perform miracles. They also denied Jesus which highlights that even his beloved and hand-picked disciples failed him and so will we. Our failures, our mistakes, the moments we lack faith, should not make us give up. We should not focus long on our missteps, misconceptions or weaknesses. None of us are called to be perfect. We are called to practice, to get stronger in our faith and transform our hearts so that we can be more like him and serve more fully. Perfection has never been part of the deal, not even for his most trusted followers when he walked on Earth with them as man.

The Lecture was well attended by members of the Cathedral and other local parishes. Monsignor’s presentation was the first step in the new Scripture Study series at the Cathedral. Please consider joining us for the study of the Gospel of Mark. Contact Noreen C. Buckstine at either ncb-25@att.net or via phone at (912) 450-3262.
"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace."
— 1 Peter 4:10

By Fr. Gerry Schreck

I am most grateful to each of you for your support of our church. I would like to make you aware that our parish now offers Online Giving, a convenient and easy way for parishioners to make financial contributions to the Cathedral, without writing checks or worrying about cash donations.

Online Giving is a direct payment program whereby your contributions are debited automatically from your checking, savings, or credit card account into your church’s bank account. It makes it easy to fulfill stewardship commitments, even when you can’t attend church. You never have to bring cash or checks to church. Giving electronically also helps the parish improve its operational efficiency.

Online Giving is a web-based offertory program that allows parishioners to make donations electronically from any location at any time. Administration is simple and easy. This site lets you set up automatic contributions and change the timing or the amount of your gift at any time. Your recurring amounts will be donated automatically and you can also make one-time donations to special causes. The system is safe and secure. In addition, you can see reports on your contribution history and generate tax statements at year end.

You will still be sent envelopes in the mail each month in order to receive the special collection envelopes. If you’d prefer to put an envelope in the basket each week, just check the box on the front which indicates “I’ve given online” and present it in the Offertory collection during Mass.

Online Giving is very easy to use. If you haven’t already signed up, please go to the Cathedral web site http://www.savannahcathedral.org/ and click on the green Online Giving logo to get started. Follow the simple step by step process to select your giving option.

GALA COMMITTEE PRESENTS RECORD CHECK

The 14th Annual Cathedral Heritage Gala was a tremendous success due to sponsorships, advertising, contributions, ticket sales, and the live auction. As a result, Co-Chairmen Michael and Linda Lee were able to present a check in the amount of $165,000 to Fr. Gerry Schreck for the Cathedral Heritage Fund. This represents an all-time record amount raised to benefit the restoration and preservation of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist for generations to come. A special thanks to Michael and Linda Lee and the entire Gala Committee for a job well done!
The first recorded organ in the Catholic community of Savannah was built by Henry Erben, one of the most renowned organ builders of the 19th century in the mid 1830’s for St. John’s Church which was then located at Drayton and Perry Streets. Erben’s opus list shows the organ was built in 1834, however, a Savannah newspaper, The Georgian, contains several articles in 1836 and 1837 regarding the raising of money for an organ for the Catholic church:

- March 10, 1836: “The ladies of the Roman Catholic Church propose holding a Fair at the Exchange tomorrow, the proceeds of which are intended for the purchase of an organ for the new church.

- May 11, 1836: “We invite public attention to the Fair, proposed to be held this day at the Exchange, by the Ladies of the Roman Catholic Church. The object is praiseworthy – to procure an organ for the new church, now in state of completion.”

- April 27, 1837: “The Ladies of the Roman Catholic Fair, respectfully inform the Citizens of Savannah, that the organ purchased with the proceeds of the same, is now completed. The public is invited this afternoon at 4 o’clock, for the purpose of testing the quality of the instrument.”

The church became a cathedral in 1850 when the new Diocese of Savannah was established. In 1856, when a larger organ was desired, the church purchased the Goodrich organ built in 1820 for use by the Independent Presbyterian Church. This organ had been ruined by the great storm of September 8th, 1854. When Independent Presbyterian contracted with the Knauff Organ Company for a new instrument, they gave the Goodrich to Mr. Knauff for $1000, which he took in part payment” for their new organ. The Goodrich organ was then rebuilt by Knauff and sold to St. John’s where it continued in use until destroyed in the Cathedral fire of 1898.

The old Erben was ultimately given to the First African Baptist Church in 1888, and was used by the oldest black congregation in the country as their organ until 1952. It still resides there today but is no longer playable. All the interior metal pipes on the windchest have been removed and only the organ case, the façade pipes and the wood pipes remain.
Minutes of a finance committee for the rebuilding of the Cathedral after the fire, dated November 17, 1899, show an amount due for a new organ to be $7,500. These records contain a copy of a letter to John Brown, organ builder from Wilmington, Delaware, dated January 17, 1900.

“Dear Mr. Brown:

Will you please send me specifications for an organ to cost about $7500 giving full details as far as practicable.

Also, your judgment as to motor and if you decide on water, what size supply pipe we would use, as we would like to bring in pipe now before work is completed, so that pipe can be concealed. You know my individual preference in all this matter.

With kind remembrance to your brother, I am sincerely yours,
Benj. J. Keiley, Rector”

The new cathedral was dedicated on Sunday morning, October 28, 1900. Church records state that a choir of 60 voices sang under the direction of F.E. Rebareram and was supported by a 12 piece orchestra and a great organ (presumably the John Brown). In a church publication dated 1902, there is a photo of the Brown organ showing trumpet pipes arranged in Jardine style. In 1912, the John Brown was converted to electric action and continued to be used until 1938, when it was considered unplayable and dismantled.

The John Brown organ was replaced by a Hammond and followed by a Baldwin in the 1950’s. In 1981, the church was in need of serious structural repair and the decision was made to restore the church to its 1912 condition. At the same time, it was also decided to purchase a new pipe organ for the Cathedral. Dr. J Harry Persse, former head of the Music Department at Armstrong State University, assembled a committee including William Clarke, Jr., to decide on a new organ. The committee chose the Noack Company to build the organ as members were familiar with the Noack recently installed at Wesley Monumental Church. Built in Georgetown, Massachusetts, the Noack pipe organ was installed in 1987 at a cost of $270,000. The instrument is a tracker organ with 34 ranks and 2,308 pipes. The case is made entirely of solid white oak, and the console trim is black walnut. James Lohmann (b. 1953), a Chicago woodcarver, made the pipes and swell screens. The woods were chosen to blend with the Cathedral’s furnishings as the white oak will darken with age.

Editor’s note: According to comments on the Noack web site, "Seldom does an organ builder have the opportunity to build an organ in a truly beautiful, acoustically perfect setting. The Savannah Cathedral provided us with such an opportunity."

We have enjoyed the sound of that organ for these past 28 years. It gives solemnity, beauty, joy, and enthusiasm to the worship here at the Cathedral. It nourishes and strengthens our faith, assists worshipers in expressing and sharing their faith and sets the tone and tempo of the liturgy. And hopefully will continue to do so for many years to come.
The reason we march: obedience. “Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die.” Proverbs 31:8

As the bus bearing the March for Life participants from Savannah approached Washington D.C. early on January 22nd, the driver pointed out various places of interest. Passing the Jefferson Memorial, I thought of the words that are therein inscribed from our Declaration of Independence “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” All? What about the least of our citizens? The ones who are totally defenseless. The ones who have no voice.

Our first stop was the Senate building. For the first time in all the years I have made this journey, our Senators met with us in person. Many in our party had worked diligently to set up this meeting and we were honored to have both Senator Johnny Isakson and Senator David Perdue speak with us and hear our plea for action and change.

When the March reached the Supreme Court, we knew immediately something was not quite right. The street was filled many angry, disrespectful, pro-abortion protestors who completely blocked the route of the March for Life directly in front of the Supreme Court.

There was a large police presence. They warned the pro-abortion protestors to remove themselves or they would be arrested. A group of young people standing with us started chanting “Jesus loves you” as the pro-abortion protestors shouted viciously in the faces of police officers and others as they were placed in the waiting police vans. The blatant differences of the opposing sides were vividly apparent. The pro-lifers were peaceful, considerate, and in the face of spewing hatred and adversity, responded in kindness and love.

This is truly a battle that rages in the spiritual realm between the forces of evil and death versus the sacrificial, ever graceful love of our God who is true author and finisher of all life. The signs carried by the pro-abortion protestors read “Keep Abortion Legal”, “Abortion on demand and without apology” and they shouted “My life, my body, my choice.”

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What a tragedy to see play out. In the 12th chapter of Revelations we are told that Satan deceives the whole world. These poor souls are so deceived they do not understand that the tiny human in the womb is a new life, a different body and a child, not a choice.

It was exciting that this year’s crowd, estimated to be about 300,000, was made up of more than 80% young people in their early twenties or younger. Truly, a New Pro Life Generation. “Thank you Lord” for the many young people who comprised the majority in attendance. Hopefully many more will be called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and stand up and be counted for the cause of life.
The members of the CCW at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist were excited to tackle the idea of how to enhance the Angel Tree donations during the Christmas Season. Like many parishes in the area, the CCW feels a special affinity for the work done at the Social Apostolate. They have been reaching out to empower people who are homeless and at-risk since 1968. Although they provide an array of services one of their goals always is to fill the gaps that prevent someone from moving forward on the path to self-sufficiency. One of their most successful programs has been the birth certificate/ID program. They help clients by processing the paperwork and paying all fees, thus providing them with documents they need to find employment and apply for many other services. They also run a soup kitchen, shower program and thrift store with a staff of only 3 full-time and 3 part-time employees.

The CCW came up with the idea of providing some Christmas cheer as well as some basic needs through the "fill a stocking project". The Angel Tree was packed with empty Christmas stockings that our generous parishioners were asked to fill with basic hygiene items and other gifts. We also collected more than $2,300 in gift cards along with a staggering amount of basic necessities. Each of the 230+ clients received a fast food gift card worth between $5 and $15 plus a stocking loaded with basic hygiene items, small surprise gifts like flashlights or wallets as well as candy and treats along with notes of hope and encouragement. Other parishes collected warm winter coats, high in demand socks and undergarments as well as food items which resulted in a celebration of give-aways at the annual Christmas dinner for the Social Apostolate clients. The Daughters of Ireland provided and prepared a wonderful turkey dinner which heightened the festive atmosphere. Many volunteers from our local parishes showed up to help serve the food, fit the coats and organize the stockings.

Our volunteers included a diverse group of parishioners from retirees to teenagers. It was a bit of organized chaos but a spirit of service and fun filled the small building. Sister Julie and her staff plus the regular volunteers were also on hand and excited to help their clients experience the sincere consideration and kindness from their community.

When the clients ate their delicious dinner and were given their gifts, the sacredness of the Christmas holiday was suddenly more profound and palpable. Both the givers and receivers felt equally blessed to be in communion with each other, their community and God. Everyone who experienced the power of hope in our faith and fellowship, along with the many smiles, hugs and prayers that were shared, were grateful to be part of the event.

The complexity of the situations surrounding the poor and needy is certainly real but part of a solution may be as simple as showing up as often as possible with love and respect. The festive atmosphere, generosity and care truly represented the spirit of Christmas and gave meaning to the reason we celebrate it. Everyone who contributed played an important role in improving the happiness and hope to the least of our brothers and sisters. We are so grateful and proud to be part of such a generous parish and diocese.
New Cathedral Ornament
Now On Sale

The latest edition of the Cathedral ornaments, which highlight our beautiful stained glass windows, has arrived. The 2015 Cathedral ornament which features St. Anthony of Padua is the ninth in the series. The St. Anthony window is the first lancet window on the left under the Assumption in the south transept. It is available for a donation of $20 at the reception desk in the rear of the church, the rectory or at: savannahcathedral.org click on gift items.

A limited number of ornaments from previous years are also available. If you are missing a particular year in your collection, please check to see if we have the one you need.