



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE PROJECT

APRIL 2013

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 2

The Straight Line

by Rick Becker

“You crumpled my paper!”

Naturally, this accusation is followed up with an indignant denial. “No, I didn’t! You crumpled your own paper!”

Sound familiar? If so, you’re a parent.

Scenes like that abound in my home. A mom and dad, seven kids, a dog—flesh and fault and frailty abound, all in an abundantly finite space. Plus, it’s winter—nobody can be shooed outside. We’re stuck with each other until April at least!

So, what to do.

When I’m around, and I’m privy to petty arguments and fighting, I have a standard response—and my kids know it well: You can draw a straight line between that kind of behavior and the war in (fill in the blank) .

Afghanistan. Darfur. Iraq. Uganda. Syria. Whatever the war du jour, and regardless of U.S. involvement, I impress upon my children that all conflict traces its roots back to personal selfishness and vendettas. Political leaders and pundits like to associate internecine conflict with abstract notions of economics, justice, and territorial sovereignty, but let’s face it: Wars are fundamentally bickering kids writ large.

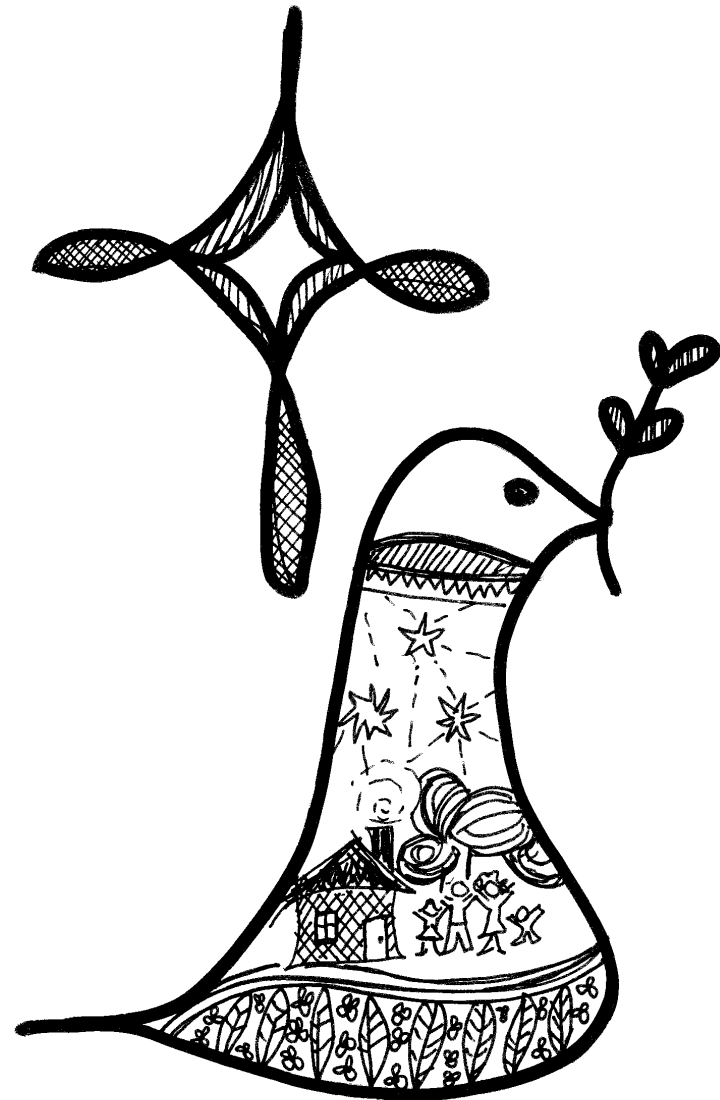
And not just bickering kids, of course. It’s me driving aggressively in response to someone cutting me off on the bypass. It’s jockeying for a place in the shortest, quickest checkout lane at the drugstore. It’s gossip and backbiting at work. It’s nursing grudges and giving full rein to a bad temper at home.

The children, of course, are incredulous: Straight line? Iraq? Syria? Really?

Yes, really. It’s not a new idea either. Consider these words from *Pacem et Terris*—Pope John XXIII’s landmark peace encyclical published fifty years ago: “The world will never be the dwelling place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of each and every man, till every man preserves in himself the order ordained by God to be preserved.”

So, no peace in the world without peace in our hearts—my heart, your heart, every heart. All the negotiations and treaties, concordats and U.N. missions, and every flavor of international diplomacy is for naught, the Pope was telling the world, unless we make peace with our neighbors—unless I make peace with my neighbor.

... continued on page 3



Reconciling Our Relationships

by Venus Wozniak

During a discussion about Creation and the Story of Original Sin, a seventh grade child asked, *Ms Venus, why does God say let US make mankind in OUR image?* Oh, boy. They are making connections that I didn’t learn until grad school when studying Trinitarian Theology. The children then delved into a conversation on the nature of God being three in one. *If we are made in God’s image, God who is 3 in 1, what does that say about us as humans?* The child responded, *humans need each*

other just as God is not God without all 3 parts of the Trinity.

This year I have been spending much time discussing scripture with children through my work in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Quite frankly, everything that is said about children being closer to the Kingdom and their ability to digest and internalize notions of the Deep is absolutely true.

... continued on page 5

Experiences with "Just Matters"

by Karen Jackson

My husband Steve and I are members of Christ the Servant Faith Community in Woodridge, IL, and are both active on the Peace and Social Justice Committee. We also participate in the church Book Study Group where we share Social Justice information as it relates to the books we discuss. Of course, immigration reform had been a hot topic for several months with people voicing their views on how the U.S. should solve the problem of millions of undocumented immigrants. One man, Ernie, was convinced that "all those people should just be sent back where they came from" and he was very vocal about his opinion.

In the spring of 2010, the Peace

and Social Justice Committee sponsored the Just Faith Module "Crossing Borders: Migration Theology and the Human Journey" with Rosemary Ward, SP and I facilitating. Members of the Book Study group were invited to participate since the program was open to all parishioners and to people in surrounding parishes. Ernie was especially invited to "come and see." Ernie accepted the challenge and those of us who already knew that Immigration Reform needed to be based on treating people with dignity and keeping families together spent the next eight weeks watching the miracle of the Holy Spirit working overtime. Ernie began to see the "issues" as "people" and understand that

undocumented immigrants had the same needs, the same hopes, and the same dreams that he had. He also began to understand what economic conditions in the countries of origin drove people to risk their lives in order to provide for their families.

All the participants in "Crossing Borders" attended the immersion experience and we chose to attend a Latino Mass at St. Isidore Parish, the home parish of three of the participants. One of these was a deacon at the parish and also Latino. He had reserved a pew up front for us and at the homily asked us to stand so he could introduce us to the people as workers for a just Immigration Reform. During the applause, one woman reached forward and touched Ernie on the shoulder. He turned to face her and she said in English, "You will do great things".

At this point in time, Ernie doesn't feel that he has done much to further the cause of Immigration Reform. However, those of us who accompanied him on his journey are sure that in God's time, when God's messenger taps him on the shoulder again, Ernie will use his unique gifts in the service of the immigrants who need him.

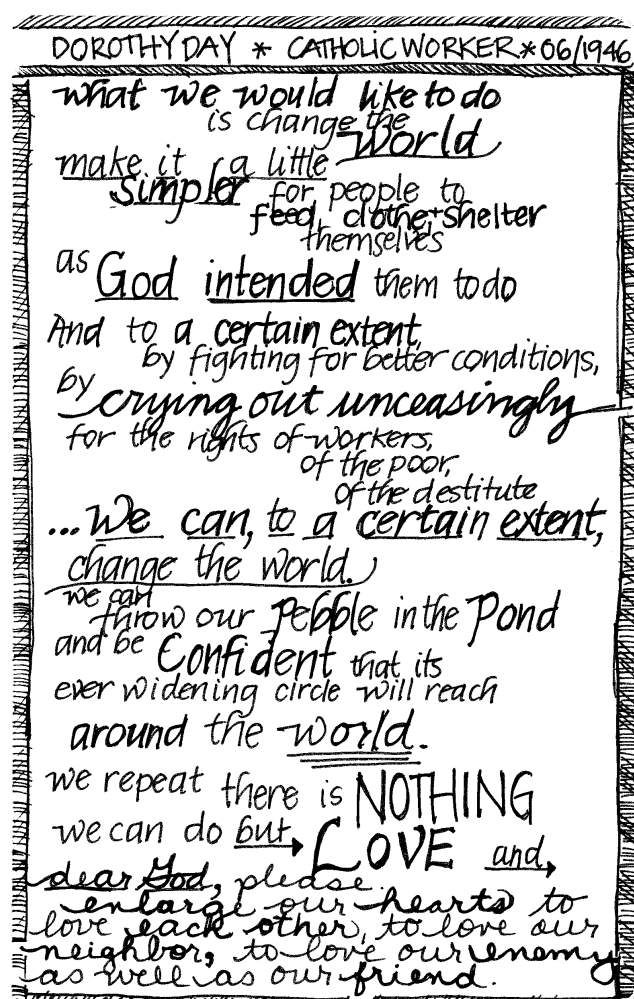
In the spring of 2011, Rosemary Ward, SP, after completing the Just Matters "Faith Encounters the Ecological Crisis" with another group, decided she would like to facilitate the program at Christ the Servant. We gathered a group of seven parishioners and completed the eight week program. Several parishioners who are passionate about ecology were unable to attend the formal program due to

work commitments. However, when we planned the follow-up meetings, they also attended and discussion centered on "Where do we go from here?" and "How do we get the parish involved in caring for God's earth?"

In DuPage County where Christ the Servant Parish is located, we are very fortunate to have a non-profit program called SCARCE which stands for "School & Community Assistance for Recycling & Compost Education." One of the many services SCARCE provides is a "Green Audit" during which all aspects of the organization's day to day functioning are audited and recommendations are made on how to reduce the carbon footprint. At the audit follow-up meeting, the "Green Team" was born. Within a year, the Green Team had made enough changes within the church building, had figured out how to get recycling for the church at a reduced cost and sponsored enough recycling programs in the parish to earn the "Earth Flag" from SCARCE which was awarded at a weekend Mass. The Green Team publishes "Green News" in the bulletin on a weekly basis and continues to sponsor recycling programs. The Green Team is a vital committee in our parish and has certainly helped our parishioners to care for God's creation.



Karen is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Illinois and belongs to Christ the Servant Catholic Church in Woodridge. She has been active on the Peace and Social Justice Committee at church since 2006.



The Straight Line

continued from page 1

St. James said it even more plainly: “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war” (4.1-2).

Yet James doesn’t just diagnosis the illness; he also points his readers to the antidote: “The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace” (3.17-18). War and conflict need no cultivation—they spring up around us like weeds. Countering discord and division,

and creating true peace, is a work of cultivation—a work requiring dedication, attention, and constancy.

Any farmer will tell you that successful cultivation also requires good seed and good soil, and here’s where my bickering kids come in. “No one should ignore or underestimate the decisive role of the family,” Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his message for the World Day of Peace this year. “It is in the family that peacemakers, tomorrow’s promoters of a culture of life and love, are born and nurtured.”

In this regard, as in others, the family is truly a school—a residential academy that

operates 24/7. We parents have a tendency to obsess about the bottom line: How to pay for the groceries and the electric bill, how to pay for another tank of gas. Such concerns weigh on us all the more in a tight economy, and some folks are struggling even to provide for essentials.


But Pope John and Pope Benedict are getting at something even more essential, more basic—that day in and day out formation in peacemaking, in shalom. As we go about our daily routines and the countless interactions we have with our children, we do well to keep in mind that we have been entrusted with the task of molding the peacemakers of tomorrow—and, in so doing, we allow ourselves to be similarly molded ourselves.

This all sounds Pollyanna-esque

at best, hopelessly naïve at worst, I know. And it’s true that I wouldn’t want my sons and daughters to enter adulthood without a comprehensive and sophisticated grasp of the origins of war.

Even so, I’m convinced that it will serve them well that their visions for changing the world will be rooted in a personalist vision for changing themselves—that they will associate big plans with little ones.

For that straight line between global conflict and personal conflict is drawn right through our own hearts. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” Jesus said. “Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14.27).

So, next time you break up a fight at your house, or you soothe a bruised ego, or you attempt to broker a reconciliation between the warring factions under your own roof, remember that you’re not only making peace at home—you’re also contributing to a peaceful world. Taking the time to trace the line between the two will equip your children all the more to bring true peace to a troubled world. 

Rick is a husband, father, nursing instructor, and religious educator. He resides with his family in South Bend, Indiana.

we are called to be
RESURRECTION
PEOPLE
to rise with Christ ▼ *we must die with Christ*
The best way to live as a community of
RESURRECTION
is to be a community of
RECONCILIATION MSA

Obedience Ball

by Madeleine DelBrel

We played the flute for you and you did not dance

It's the 14th of July
The whole world is going to dance
All around, for months and years, the world is dancing
The more we die, the more we dance
Waves of war, waves of dance.

There is so much noise
All the serious people have fallen asleep
The religious recite lauds for Saint Henry, the king
And me, I remember
The other king,
King David, dancing before the Ark.

Because even if a lot of saintly folk don't like to dance
There are a lot of saints who needed to dance
So happy were they to be living:
Saint Teresa with her castanets
Saint John of the Cross with the Baby Jesus in his arms,
And saint Francis, before the pope.

If we were really so happy with you, O Lord,
We wouldn't be able to resist
This need to dance unfurling over the world
And we would finally be able to guess
That dance which pleases you to see us dance
Marrying our steps to your Providence.

Because I think that you have maybe had enough
Of people always speaking about serving you
with the bark of a captain,
Of knowing you with the words of a professor
Of reaching you with the practice of sport
Of loving you as one does in an old couple.

One day when you were in the mood for something different,
You invented saint Francis,
And you made him your juggler.
And for us, so that we might invent ourselves
To be a joyful people who dance their life with you.

...

But we forget the music of your spirit,
And we turn our life into a gym exercise;
We forget that in your arms, one dances,
That your Holy Will
Is of an inconceivable fantasy,



That is only monotony and boredom
For old souls
Who crochet sweaters
During the joyous ball of your love

Lord, come invite us.
We are ready to dance for you this work that is to be done,
These tasks, the supper to prepare, this long watch where we will
Grow weary.

...

Make us to live our lives,
Not like a chess match where all is set
Not like a game where all is difficult
Not like a theory that pounds our head
But like a fête without end where meeting you renews itself

Like a ball
Like a dance
Between the arms of your grace
In the universal music of love.

Lord, come invite us.

*From *Nous autres, gens des rues* [We, the Ordinary People of the Street], Madeliene Delbrel, Paris: Le Seuil, 1966.*

New translation by Michael Driessen.

Madeliene Delbrel was a French Catholic mystic, lover of the poor and the proletariat, poet, social worker, convert, sister to the Worker Priests, and a transcendent playful radiant joyful soul.

Relationships

In level III (ages 9 - 12) of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd we spend an ample amount of time dissecting the stories of Creation and the Story of Original Sin. We then apply them to the story of Redemption (Jesus' life death and resurrection) and Parousia (Christ's second coming.)

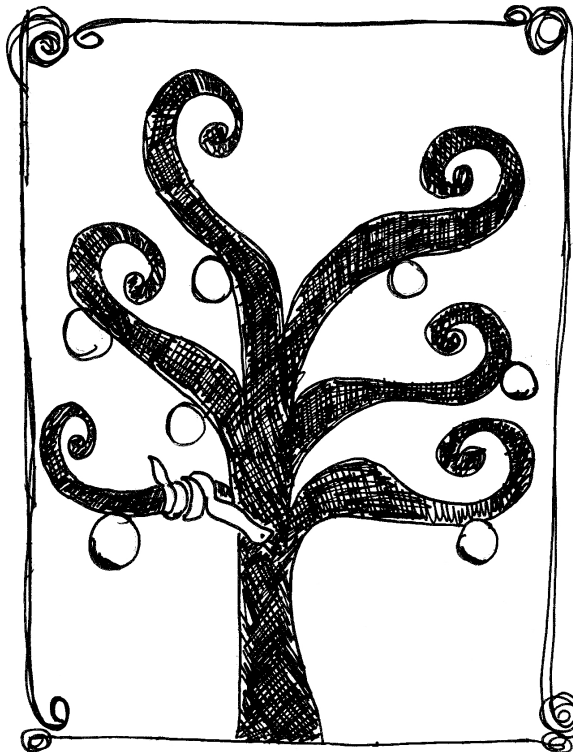
During our work with the story of Adam and Eve eating the Forbidden Fruit a few astounding revelations were made. We read through Genesis 3 - we went line by line determining what exactly was going on. Then I began asking some questions. *What was the original sin?* A few children blurt out, *eating the fruit* and then I hear muttered: *believing the lie*. I stopped. *What lie?* The children are all in a tizzy. *The lie that the snake told - that God didn't want us to be like him.*

This took us back to Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

If God made us in his image, He did indeed want us to be like Him.

continued from page 1



A few days later the conversation continued. We picked up where we left off. *How was life different after they ate the fruit?* The answers ensued: *They knew they were naked... They hid from God now when they used to walk with him freely.* And I asked, *What does this mean - they hid from God when they never hid from Him before?* The response: *They were ashamed.*

Then came man and woman's response to God when he confronts them about what they have done. I asked, *What does the man say to God when God asks him "why?"*

The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. (Gen 3:12)

One of the children responded, *they blame each other, they even blame God* (i.e. the woman you put here with me.) The woman in turn blames the serpent.

So there you have it, the story of humankind's first sin - from the mouths of children. We have the cycle of sin - believing the lies that the serpent tells us, acting on belief of the lie, shame that follows when we realize what we have done, and then the blame game - not claiming responsibility for our actions. This is not easy for us, even as adults, to pinpoint in our own lives. What lies have we chosen to believe? Where does the shame show up? Who do we let take the blame for our choices? Where do we deny responsibility for our actions?

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd level I, children ages 3-6 spend their time exploring the mysteries of the love of God as experienced from the perspective of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. He leads them to green pastures and fresh water. He watches over his sheep. He keeps them safe. If one gets lost he searches until he

finds it. The children meditate on this. I know its hard to imagine a three year old meditating- but, it happens. This space for mediation is created and the children are invited into this loving relationship with the Good Shepherd. At an early age, the child is rooted in infinite love of the Good Shepherd as is mirrored in the love parents have for their children.

In level II (for ages 6-9) of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd children are invited to explore what it means to live and be in relationship. Being in relationship means that sometimes we hurt the ones we love. We must look at ourselves and our actions and say we are sorry. We explore this through studying the moral parables - The Good Samaritan, The Lost Son, The Wolf and the Hireling, The 10 Bridesmaids, The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, The True Vine, etc.

The parable that we spend much time on in preparation for First Reconciliation is The True Vine. Sophia Cavaletti, the pedagog of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, recommends that the child meditate on this parable for hours at a time weekly leading up to the first celebration of the sacrament.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

... continued on page 6

Relationships

continued from page 5

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples... (John 15)

There are the obvious remarks - I am a branch on the vine. If I

remain in Jesus, I will stay on the vine. If I don't - I wither, fall off and get thrown into the burn pile. So I better remain in Jesus to stay on the vine. But let's look at it from a different perspective. We have all seen a vine at some point or another. How is it that each and every branch stays alive on a vine. There is indeed sap that carries the nutrients and water necessary for life to the very tips of each branch. Unless... Unless there is some sort of blockage that doesn't allow the sap to flow. What are these blockages? Believing the lies, acting on the doubt, soaking in shame, the blame game - more simply put: sin.

Have you ever seen a wilted portion of a vine? Seldom is the

withered part just one branch. Usually the blockage in the sap affects many branches on the vine, yes? My sin is not just my sin. My actions, my shame, my blaming, affects the whole vine - blocking that most precious, divine sap from many of the branches on the vine.

The vine is the Mystical Body of Christ. We are indeed all connected to each other and to Christ. Our very nature is that we need each other in the same way that God is not God without all 3 parts of the Trinity.

Do you remember your First Reconciliation? Do you remember the last time you participated in the sacrament? Was it a fearful experience? No doubt it is the least fun of all the Sacraments. But it is most definitely the most imperative to healing broken lives, broken families, broken communities,

our broken world.

I would venture to say that if we shift our perspective to one of relationship rather than of punishment, the Sacrament of Reconciliation will become a gem sought after rather than the pebble in our shoe. Maybe what we need is to focus on our relationships - most especially the one with the Triune God.

Remember the end of the Story of Original Sin? Before God banished them from the garden He gave them clothes to cover the shame. He gave them grace. He gives it abundantly He gives it unconditionally. Wouldn't we all like to be in deeper touch with a God who offers that?

Venus is the Director of Faith Formation at St. Dennis Church in Lockport, Illinois.



About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

We need help with:

- Articles and topics: news, views, reviews, letters, event listings, etc.;
- Art: hand-drawn or graphic design; or
- Web and outreach volunteers.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

To ensure you continue to receive The Visitation, please subscribe by emailing the address above.

About Nativity House

Nativity House will serve as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The project will also foster a mothering community offering education and support for all mothers. The program will operate on-site with community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community. Overall we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

The project is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that will be extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us regarding this project, please email Venus at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
5621 Plymouth St.
Downers Grove, IL 60516

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Easy Essay

Better or Better Off

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



The world would be better off,

if people tried

to become better.

And people would

become better

if they stopped trying

to be better off.

For when everybody tries

to become better off,

nobody is better off.

But when everybody tries

to become better,

everybody is better off.

Everybody would be rich

if nobody tried

to be richer.

And nobody would be poor

if everybody tried

to be the poorest.

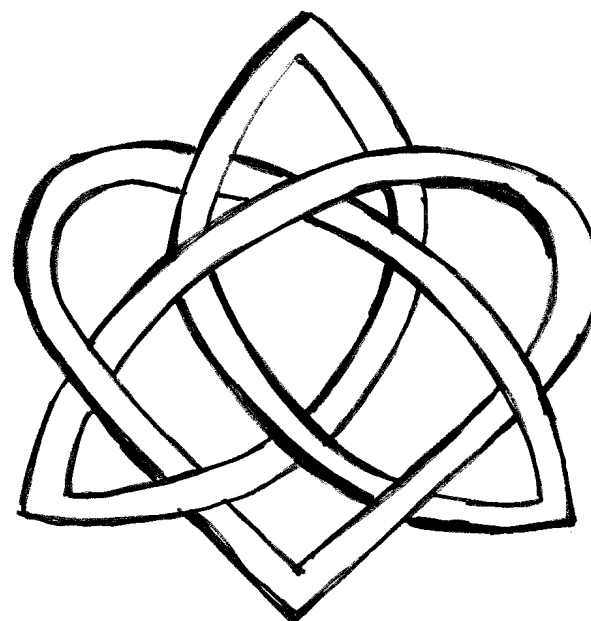
And everybody would be

what he ought to be

if everybody tried to be

what he wants

the other fellow to be.



St. Therese of Lisieux

by Brian Garland

*Patroness of Florists and Gardens
Feast: October 1st*

Since July, 2012, I've been the Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Thérèse, Little Flower Catholic Church. Before working there, I didn't know much about St. Thérèse, besides being known as the Little Flower, to be honest. Since learning more and more about her, I am convinced that she is the perfect model by which one could make a meaningful Lenten journey.

Therese was born in France in 1873, the pampered daughter of a mother who had wanted to be a saint and a father who had wanted to be monk. The two married but decided they would be celibate - until a priest told them that was not how God wanted a marriage to work! They followed his advice very well as they had nine children.

Tragedy and loss came quickly to Thérèse when her mother died of breast cancer when she was four and a half years old. Her sixteen year old sister Pauline became her second mother, which made the second loss even worse when Pauline

entered the Carmelite convent five years later. When her other sisters, Marie and Leonie, left to join religious orders, Therese was left alone with her last sister Celine and her father. Therese wanted to enter the Carmelite convent to join Pauline and Marie, but she was too young. Therese was so eager to enter the convent at an early age (even to the point of petitioning Pope Leo XIII!), that she was eventually accepted.

But life in the convent wasn't all she dreamt it would be. "Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love." She took every chance to sacrifice, no matter how small. She smiled at the sisters she didn't like. She ate everything she was given without complaining—so that she was often given the worst leftovers.

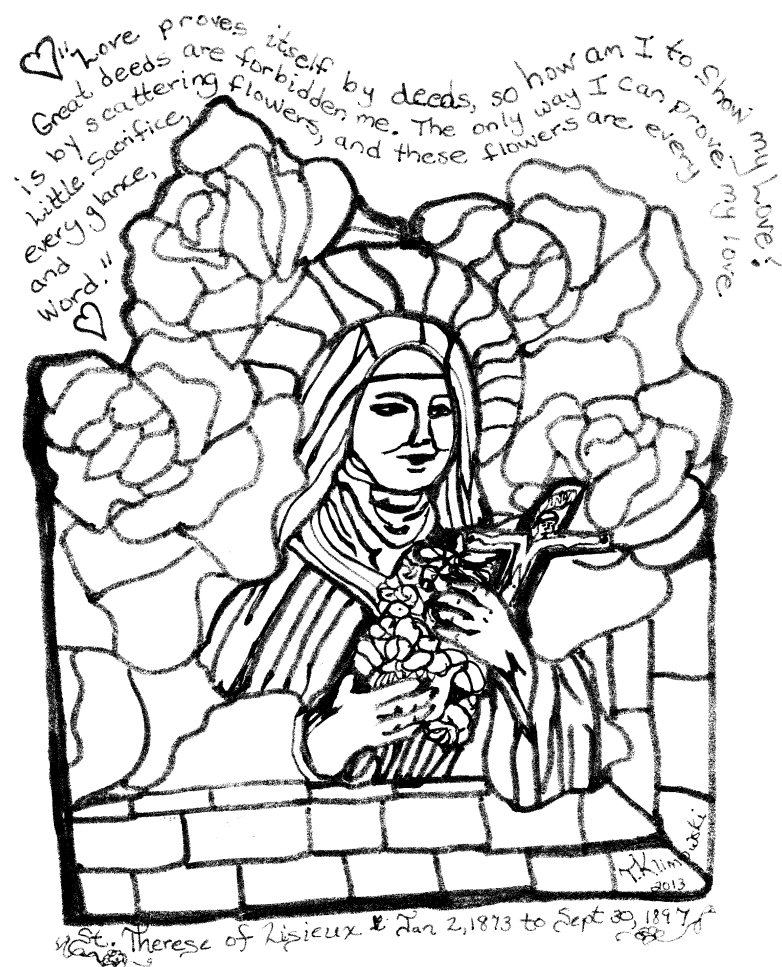
Thérèse worried about how she could achieve holiness in the life she led. She thought there must be a way for people living

hidden, little lives like hers. "God would not make me wish for something impossible and so, in spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint... I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new."



*Brian is Director of Liturgy
and Music at St. Thérèse,
Little Flower Catholic
Church, in South Bend,
Indiana*

This Lent, I will try to model St. Thérèse, Little Flower. I will smile at those who may not like me so much. I will eat what's given me without complaint. Instead of arguing, I will beg



THE VISITATION

In this issue:

- ***War and Reconciliation***
- ***Local Justice Activities***
- ***Women of Joy***