One of my favorite quotes from Pope Francis is, “The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... And you have to start from the ground up.”

As I reflect on this I cannot help but think of the faith of the four stretcher bearers who brought the paralytic to Jesus by opening the roof and lowering him to Jesus, the church. These men are not simply spectators to Christ’s actions. In some way it seems that they are the ones who provoked the reaction.

“Heal the wounds, heal the wounds…. And you have to start from the ground up.”

All of you whether in a hospital, a college or a prison are on the ground floor. Many times you are the ones who have to open the roof and lower the person down. It is through your faith that others can get up and walk.

My prayer is that this year of mercy is a year of growth for you, your families and all the people you touch each day.

Jim
MCI, NORFOLK MEN CELEBRATE GOD’S LOVE AND MERCY

By Sr. Anne Marie Raftery

One of Pope Francis’ frequent quotes, “THE NAME OF GOD IS MERCY,” found ready and rich soil in the hearts of the prisoners at MCI Norfolk.


The Mercy Retreat Day got off to great start with a rousing and inspiring talk by Fr. Matthew Williams. This was following by lively small group discussions on our relationship with our dad and how this impacts our relationship with our Merciful Heavenly Father. The small groups were facilitated by DOC Chaplains Maureen Clark and Peg Newman as well as our regular volunteers who assist the needs of the respective Spanish, Vietnamese and English speaking groups.

Other highlights of the day were musical presentations from the Catholic Bethany Choir, the Catholic Spanish Choir and the Dominican Echoes of Truth Choir. The Vietnamese Catholics gave a touching Pantomime presentation on: “Creating A Community of Mercy.” Several inmates read their “personal experience of God’s mercy” from their above mentioned book, “MIRRORS OF MERCY”.

Later in the day, we held an Open Forum Discussion which recapped the day and focused on suggested monthly practices toward creating a Prison Community of Mercy.

The Retreat Day closed with Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction with music by Frank & Ellen René. This spiritual experience was listed as the most transforming and merciful in the inmate evaluations for the day.

The Retreat’s goal is being met daily as the men claim and live the message of the attached MCI Norfolk’s Mercy Logo, created by Mike, a resident artist: Looking into the Eye of Christ
Looking with the Eye of Christ
Looking thru the Eye of Christ.
Pope Francis’ Visit to Inmates at Curran-Fromhold Prison
September 2015

It seems so long ago that Pope Francis came to the United States for the World Meeting of Families and kept the Nation glued to the media. We waited to hear every word he spoke and to watch every action he took.

This being the Year of Mercy, gives us yet more time to reflect on his wise words that were spoken at Curran-Fromhold Prison, Philadelphia. Below is the full text.

“Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for receiving me and giving me the opportunity to be here with you and to share this time in your lives. It is a difficult time, one full of struggles. I know it is a painful time not only for you, but also for your families and for all of society. Any society, any family, which cannot share or take seriously the pain of its children, and views that pain as something normal or to be expected, is a society “condemned” to remain a hostage to itself, prey to the very things which cause that pain. I am here as a pastor, but above all as a brother, to share your situation and to make it my own. I have come so that we can pray together and offer our God everything that causes us pain, but also everything that gives us hope, so that we can receive from him the power of the resurrection.

I think of the Gospel scene where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. This was something his disciples found hard to accept. Even Peter refused, and told him: “You will never wash my feet” (Jn 13:8).

In those days, it was the custom to wash someone’s feet when they came to your home. That was how they welcomed people. The roads were not paved, they were covered with dust, and little stones would get stuck in your sandals. Everyone walked those roads, which left their feet dusty, bruised or cut from those stones. That is why we see Jesus washing feet, our feet, the feet of his disciples, then and now.

Life is a journey, along different roads, different paths, which leave their mark on us.

We know in faith that Jesus seeks us out. He wants to heal our wounds, to soothe our feet which hurt from travelling alone, to wash each of us clean of the dust from our journey. He doesn’t ask us where we have been, he doesn’t question us what about we have done. Rather, he tells us: “Unless I wash your feet, you have no share with me” (Jn 13:8). Unless I wash your feet, I will not be able to give you the life which the Father always dreamed of, the life for which he created you. Jesus comes to meet us, so that he can restore our dignity as children of God. He wants to help us to set out again, to resume our journey, to recover our hope, to restore our faith and trust. He wants us to keep walking along the paths of life, to realize that we have a mission, and that confinement is not the same thing as exclusion.

Continued on next page
Listen

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Life means “getting our feet dirty” from the dust-filled roads of life and history. All of us need to be cleansed, to be washed. All of us are being sought out by the Teacher, who wants to help us resume our journey. The Lord goes in search of us; to all of us he stretches out a helping hand. It is painful when we see prison systems which are not concerned to care for wounds, to soothe pain, to offer new possibilities. It is painful when we see people who think that only others need to be cleansed, purified, and do not recognize that their weariness, pain and wounds are also the weariness, pain and wounds of society. The Lord tells us this clearly with a sign: he washes our feet so we can come back to the table.

The table from which he wishes no one to be excluded. The table which is spread for all and to which all of us are invited.

This time in your life can only have one purpose: to give you a hand in getting back on the right road, to give you a hand to help you rejoin society. All of us are part of that effort, all of us are invited to encourage, help and enable your rehabilitation. A rehabilitation which everyone seeks and desires: inmates and their families, correctional authorities, social and educational programs. A rehabilitation which benefits and elevates the morale of the entire community.

Jesus invites us to share in his lot, his way of living and acting. He teaches us to see the world through his eyes. Eyes which are not scandalized by the dust picked up along the way, but want to cleanse, heal and restore. He asks us to create new opportunities: for inmates, for their families, for correctional authorities, and for society as a whole.

I encourage you to have this attitude with one another and with all those who in any way are part of this institution. May you make possible new opportunities, new journeys, new paths.

All of us have something we need to be cleansed of, or purified from. May the knowledge of that fact inspire us to live in solidarity, to support one another and seek the best for others.

Let us look to Jesus, who washes our feet. He is “the way, and the truth, and the life”. He comes to save us from the lie that says no one can change. He helps us to journey along the paths of life and fulfillment. May the power of his love and his resurrection always be a path leading you to new life.”

When we gathered for Mass on Ash Wednesday and received our ashes, the Gospel passage that the Church gave us to begin Lent was from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Jesus is with his disciples and he is teaching them what they must do if they want to follow him. He tells them two things. They must learn how to pray, to fast and to give alms. And, once learned, the disciples must not display these works like the hypocrites do, but exercise them quietly and faithfully. Jesus reminds them three times, “Your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” (Mt 6:18).

Lent is the preferred time for catechumens to prepare for entrance into the Church. It is also the optimal time for those of us who have been baptized to strive to live more fully the words spoken to us when we received our ashes: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” Precisely because of the Lord’s mandate to his disciples, Lent has always incorporated a call to both catechumen and baptized alike to grow more completely toward Christ by means of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These are the three works of Lent.

I once had a spiritual director who told me, “If you find any one of these works easy, you’re not doing it right.” The older I get, the more true I find this to be. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are tough. They stretch us beyond ourselves. In prayer I acknowledge someone greater than myself. In fasting, I confess to a life better than the one I am now living. In almsgiving, I embrace a needy brother or sister as loved in the Lord’s eyes and equal to myself.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the need and the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving (or mercy) in the Christian life comes to us from a sermon by St. Peter of Ravenna (c. 380-450), an early Bishop of Ravenna, Italy. Peter’s oratory and writing are so exquisitely beautiful and truthful that he was given the Greek name “Chrysologus,” which means “golden-worded.” Pope Benedict XIII honored him with the title “Doctor of the Church” in 1729. May these words of St. Peter Chrysologus be a source of inspiration and encouragement for us all this Lent:

There are three things, my brothers and sisters, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one and they give life to each other.

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God’s ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

Let this be the pattern for all when they practice mercy: show mercy to others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you. Therefore, let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defense, a threefold-united prayer in our favor. (Sermon 43)
Every day we are hearing about new government initiatives to combat the opioid epidemic that is currently gripping our nation. Countless new programs have been devised, inpatient detox and rehab beds have been created, and community groups are forming in droves. The news channels' websites have Special Report sections (Boston's WCVB website has a tab labeled ‘Opioids'). Newspapers' headlines shout out the news: “New Bedford sees five overdoses in five hours” and “Sixteen overdoses in one day” in Brockton. A mayor in New York has proposed Safe Houses in which addicts can get high under the watchful eye of doctors and nurses, armed with Narcan in case they overdose. Narcan, once relegated to hospitals, is now a household word.

And yet… the crisis goes on.

So where do people go when prevention doesn’t work, when there aren’t enough detox beds, when they find themselves or their loved ones ensnared in the web of addiction? Where do people find strength? Hope? Compassion? Understanding?

On the first Saturday of this month, I accompanied a friend to the First Saturday Family Healing from Addictions prayer service at Holy Ghost Parish in Whitman. The First Saturday program at Holy Ghost was created by the mother of an addict; she is also a parish nurse. The program doesn’t promise a cure from addiction; it doesn’t promise medical treatment for addiction. First Saturday Family Healing consists of praying the Rosary as a group, with attendees voicing the (first) names of their loved ones to be lifted in prayer by the group. The Rosary is followed by the St. Michael prayer, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and finally a brief talk by a faith witness, all while the Eucharist is exposed in adoration. After the program, attendees are invited to a light lunch and fellowship.

I sat in the chapel with my friend, and listened to the people around me stating the names of their loved ones who are struggling with addictions. “Nick”. “Gina”. “Christopher”. “Kelly”. “Joseph”….some people named two or three names, a couple of people named four or five. I was awed, and brought to tears.

I was awed by a few things: first, the number of names I was hearing, each name equating to a human life impacted by addiction, each human life surrounded by countless others who love them. Next, that such a large number of people- about 35 in all- came together on a Saturday at midday to pray the Rosary with strangers. As I sat there in the chapel with them, I sensed an absence of anger, an absence of despair, an absence of fear; there was just a sense of faith and hope. Just a community of people clinging to their Faith, and being with others who are also involved with a similar struggle.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the feeling I had while sitting there: That complete strangers, from different towns, from different walks of life, from different circumstances, all converged upon Holy Ghost parish to give their sorrow to the Lord, and to draw strength, hope and compassion from Him, reminded me that the power of community, of prayer, of faith, is so strong and so ever-present. And it struck me: THIS is Mercy.

I encourage anyone who reads this to visit Holy Ghost Parish’s Divine Mercy Chapel on the First Saturday of any month. The healing program begins promptly at 11 AM.

(Please see flyer for First Saturdays in attachments)
Jesus Wept

There is no escaping bereavement in our lifetime. Eventually all of us are confronted by the death of a loved one. Jesus Christ, Himself, mourned the death of His friend Lazarus and wept as He heard of him being placed in a tomb.

“When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.” And Jesus wept” John 11:33-35

During these days of Lent, we, the Church, accompany each other as we mourn and weep through the Reading of Jesus hearing of Lazarus death and the Reading of the Passion. These Readings may also stir us to mourn and weep of our own loss of loved ones as well as mourn the loss of our own immortality. As strange as it sounds, Lent gives us the gift of being able to reflect on death.

However, death and weeping do not prevail. We are an Easter people! We believe in Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Pope Francis teaches us in the article below the importance of mourning and weeping and how it leads to peace.

May this article bring you and those you minister to comfort in knowing that when you weep you are not alone.

“Pope Francis extols 'gift of tears'”
By Megan Fincher   September 16, 2013
National Catholic Reporter

“Although we focus much of our attention on Pope Francis' smiles and spontaneity, looking closer, we can also find that he is gently but firmly imploring us to weep.

On Saturday, at the Mass for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Francis challenged Catholics to come face to face with human misery so they can fully appreciate Jesus' crucifixion.

“First of all the mystery of the cross,” he said, according to Vatican Radio. "It can only be understood, a little bit, by kneeling, in prayer, but also through tears. They are the tears that bring us close to this mystery."
Francis said if we let ourselves cry, we can then recognize "the cry of the penitent, the cry of the brother and the sister who are looking upon so much human misery."

But, he assured the congregation, "Mary will make us understand how great and humble this mystery [of the cross] is; how sweet as honey and how bitter as aloe. That she will be the one who accompanies us on this journey, which no one can take if not ourselves. Each one of us must take it. With the mother, weeping and on our knees."

Francis has urged such weeping several times in his first six months as pope. When he visited the Italian island of Lampedusa in July, he met refugees just arriving by boat from Africa and the Middle East.

"Who has wept for the deaths of these brothers and sisters?" Francis asked during a homily at Mass there. "Who has wept for the people who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who wanted something to support their families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of 'suffering with'; the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep."

Again, Francis challenged us to "ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves, and even in those who anonymously make socio-economic decisions that open the way to tragedies like this.

"Who has wept? Who in today's world has wept?"

Why is Francis asking us to cry? Many would say there is enough tragedy in the world, and we should try and stay positive. Francis, paradoxically, is trying to show us that mourning is positive. When we relate so intimately with strangers that we can weep over their sorrows, we create an unbreakable bond of peace.

In an April homily, Francis told of "the gift of tears," a charism often attributed to saints. He encouraged the small congregation at Casa Santa Marta to ask the Lord for the ability to weep like Mary Magdalene at Christ's tomb.

"All of us have felt joy, sadness and sorrow in our lives, [but] have we wept during the darkest moment? Have we had that gift of tears that prepare the eyes to look, to see the Lord?" Francis asked.

"We, too, can ask the Lord for the gift of tears," Francis said. "It is a beautiful grace ... to weep praying for everything: for what is good, for our sins, for graces, for joy itself. ... [It] prepares us to see Jesus."
And in Jesus, we see our brothers and sisters, especially those naked, hungry, sick or in prison (Matthew 25). This leads us to Francis’ recent declaration to fast and pray for peace in Syria.

For if we can imagine a stranger lying maimed or dead amid rubble, even our most hated enemy, and if we can taste their pain for even a moment, the tears we shed will certainly water the seeds of peace.”


Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee to we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.
Local pastoral visitors gather to pray, reflect on ministry to the sick
By Mark Labbe
The Pilot
Posted: 2/5/2016

WAKEFIELD -- Pastoral Visitors and ministers of Communion who offer support to the sick or infirm came together to listen to a lecture by Sister Anne D'Arcy, CSJ and share their work-related experiences during a conference at St. Joseph Parish in Wakefield, Jan. 31.

The two hour conference, entitled "A Time of Prayer for Pastoral Visitors and Ministers of Communion to the Sick," was co-sponsored by the Office of Spiritual Life and the Office of Chaplaincy at the Archdiocese of Boston. It is the first of five conferences that will be held over the next few months.

Continued on next page
The event at the parish began with a prayer, a song, and a reading from the Gospel. The reading was from the Gospel of Mark, and told the story of the paralyzed man who was lowered down on a mat into a crowded house by his friends to see Jesus. Jesus, upon seeing the man's faith, forgave his sins. Some people in the crowd questioned Jesus, saying only God has the power forgive sins. In response, Jesus restored the paralyzed man's movement, thus proving that he had the authority to forgive man's sins.

Sister Anne, the associate director of the Office of Spiritual Life, focused on the reading in her talk, as well as the Year of Mercy. She said the story illustrates the "importance of the mercy of forgiveness," and likened the man's friends to the caregivers at the gathering.

"By your ministry, you bring people to Jesus," Sister Anne said.

She said that a caregiver is "the face of mercy," and they "may be the only face of mercy (their patients) ever see."

"This is one of the great corporal works of mercy, to visit the sick," Sister Anne said.

Following the talk, those in attendance participated in prayer before sharing their experiences working as caregivers in a group session.

During the session, Rose Dittmer, coordinator for Adult Faith Formation at St. Joseph Parish and a spiritual caregiver in hospitals and nursing homes, said she moved at the fact that patients with Alzheimer's disease or dementia often retain the basics of their faith, even as their other memories slip away.

"They may not know you or anybody around them, but they always know their prayers... that always touches me tremendously," she said, as those around her nodded their heads in agreement.

Barbara Redmond, who volunteers her time at nursing homes and is an adjunct faculty member at Loyola Institute for Ministry in New Orleans, spoke about the importance of offering spiritual care to those of different faiths, and not just to those who are Catholic.

She said that when she was younger, she was hospitalized after injuring her back. During that time, a protestant minister would come in everyday for the other person in the room, and he would offer a prayer for both her and Redmond, who is Catholic.

"I was just so moved that he included me and felt I was just as much a part as (the other person) in his prayers," she said.

Redmond said she now offers spiritual care for patients as well as their nurses and others in their rooms, if they want.

During the discussion, the caregivers also spoke on the importance of offering hugs to patients, as well as seeing patients as human beings, rather than as their illnesses.
Parish Outreach to the Sick and Homebound

Listen

Time of Prayer for Parish Pastoral Visitors and Ministers of Communion to the Sick

WALK WITH CHRIST

Mark 2:1-12 Jesus Heals a Paralytic

This day will focus on the growth in faith that happens as we follow Jesus and witness the healing power of his presence.

The Office of Worship and Spiritual Life and the Pastoral Visitor Project offers regional Mornings and Afternoons of Prayer for Pastoral Visitors and Eucharistic Ministers to the Sick. This year’s schedule:

**March 5, 2016**  
St. John’s West Roxbury  
10:00 AM – 12:00

**March 12, 2016**  
Our Lady’s, Newton  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

**April 9, 2016**  
St. Francis, Dracut  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

You are welcome to attend any of them.

To register: Call the Office of Spiritual Life at 617-779-3640
As part of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, chaplains and health-care providers are being presented with a wonderful pastoral-care opportunity. The Boston Area Order of Malta and Saint John’s Seminary are organizing a healing Mass, at which Cardinal Seán will preside. The Mass will take place on Sunday, April 24, at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston.

As a hospital chaplain for the Archdiocese of Boston, who is involved with the Order of Malta and Saint John's Seminary, it is a pleasure to let you know about this special event and hope you will pass along the information to patients, their family members, and your colleagues who are involved with nursing homes and assisted-care facilities.

Healing Masses have a long history of providing comfort to those who are ill. For the past 30 years, members of the Order of Malta have made pilgrimages to Lourdes, France, where a healing Mass is one of the highlights of the experience. This new event in Boston, as part of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, will be just as joyous. For any patients who are living with episodic or chronic illness, coping with ongoing pain issues, recently diagnosed with an serious illness, preparing for surgery or having a difficult time after surgery, the Healing Mass can be a source of great comfort. It provides a way to develop a closer connection with God and to obtain a greater sense of peace of mind and heart.

"By uniting the sick more closely to the Passion of Christ, the anointing is a “source of strength for both the soul and the body,” said Monsignor James P. Moroney, Rector of Saint John's Seminary and a Chaplain for the Order of Malta. The prayer of the Church asks that ‘sin and the remnants of sin be taken away.’ Monsignor Moroney goes on to reference the Holy See adding that the anointing, ‘also implores a restoration of health, but always in order that bodily healing may bring greater union with God through the increase of grace.’

That the Mass is taking place within the context of The Jubilee Year of Mercy is significant. Traditionally, pilgrims have traveled to Rome to mark Jubilee years, but Pope Francis wanted the faithful to be able to make pilgrimages closer to home. The Holy Father invited dioceses from around the world to open their Holy Doors. A Holy Door, sealed during ordinary times, is an entrance to a cathedral or basilica that symbolizes a path to salvation. The Holy Door of Mercy was opened in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Dec. 13, 2015 in a Mass officiated by vicar general Bishop Peter J. Uglietto.

We are delighted to be working with Saint John's Seminary. The seminarians will be an important part of the Mass, providing much needed staffing to make this significant endeavor possible. Equally as important to those of us in health care, the Mass engages the next generation of priests in the work of hospital chaplaincy, allowing them to bring this understanding to their future work in parishes, hospitals, and schools.

Hopefully, you will take this opportunity to encourage individuals, families, and groups to attend this special Healing Mass. Individuals may want to plan a trip into Boston with an ill or elderly family member. Assisted-care facilities will organize group outings and provide transportation. This is a pilgrimage, and, for many, perhaps the first chance to attend Mass with Cardinal Seán as the presider. Because of the number of people attending, a small number of individuals will receive the anointing. Registration will be required, and participants will be invited in advance based on health condition. If you would like more information, please contact me at cbgibson@comcast.net or by phone at 781-799-6510.
Listen

40 Days

The Light is On for You
Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Don't forget to check out the enclosed attachments.

Many events are advertised.

"The Gibsons were awarded the St. John the Evangelist Medal for their constant willingness to go above and beyond for the good of the Church, and for their faithful contributions to the spiritual life of St. John's Seminary.

Pilot photo/CardinalSeansBlog.org

(See Craig's article on the Health Care Ministry page)