

Awaken

the soul & let your spirit fly

A bimonthly publication of Good Shepherd Catholic Church ~ steadfast in awakening our true being in God.

THE PRIORITY OF SUNDAY MASS *Let's start here!*

This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24

"We don't know how to rest," Father Michael counsels, guiding the faithful to view Sunday Mass as, first and foremost, *the rest we need*.

"It's our connection to Him, in the Eucharist, and in the homily," he continues, stating how Sunday Mass starts the week by spiritually nourishing us.

Referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the pastor urges the faithful to re-familiarize themselves with CCC 2174-2195, regarding the Lord's Day. The absolute primer and authority on Sunday Mass, the Catechism offers Catholics answers to every question about the Mass, the Eucharist, the obligation, and the day of grace and rest from work.

(Type "CCC 2174" into your search bar, and viola! It's that easy! The Catechism in its entirety is provided digitally by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

"It really all depends on the hierarchy of values," Father Michael instructs straightforwardly, stating, "it's obvious if we're not putting God first; it shows in

our decision-making." He correlates the decision to "make time for Sunday Mass" *with* the virtue of discipline.

"Someone shared with me about the difference between motivation and discipline," he tells, explaining how motivation can easily fail.

"With discipline, you won't fail. You show up," Father Michael contends, because of obedience rooted in God's love.

"We won't always have warm fuzzies in our relationship with God, but by loving God, we are actually loving ourselves," Father Michael says, adding "it may seem opposed to what the world is telling me but I am doing what is best for me..." making Sunday Mass a priority.

▶ "Every day should be a Sunday, Father Michael says, in terms of feeding our souls, spiritually, on this ongoing journey of conversion.

▶ "Virtual Mass is not a substitute for Sunday Mass," Father Michael insists of the digital options so commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. He questions, "What prevents attending Mass in person today?"

▶ "How about when traveling? Or on vacation?" he asks, hoping that in all the detailed travel plans, Mass is included.

You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.

St. John Chrysostom

Find more from Fr. Michael about "*resting on the seventh day*." Visit the parish website (Living Lights menu, Parish Plan, *Making Sunday Mass a Priority*.)



Practice the faith...

Awaken THE SOUL

Laura Blakey

PRAYER is "poetry to God"

"The truth is, I struggle with prayer," says Laura Blakey candidly, sharing out loud what so many people feel deep inside.

"Some days are easy and some days I just don't know what to say," she acknowledges of her conversations with God. "But every day, I know he hears me, He knows my heart, He knows me," Laura believes of both talkative and wordless prayers.

Laura Blakey turns to prayer faithfully amid a busy life! When not engaged with her work, Laura participates with the Works of Mercy and Parish Life Activities ministries. She also often supports the Knights of Columbus throughout the year. She is active with Cursillo and Walking with Purpose women's Bible study, too. Below, check out Laura's 4 points about making prayer your own "poetry to God!"



"Everything you do can be a prayer," she proposes, citing how even the laundry can become a worthy, meaningful prayer.

"I am thanking God for every piece that I have to put in there and wash," she says, stirring the mind to think of every sock, shirt, and dish towel, and of course, the washing machine itself.

Her powerful point? Even the most mundane of chores and the sometimes drudgery of duty *belong* side-by-side with all the prayers of joy, gratitude and thanksgiving.

3 BATTLE DISTRACTIONS

Laura regrets interruptions, distractions or prayers cut short by busy schedules. Recovering from a prayer plan gone awry can seem impossible.

"I know *who* it is," Laura says, pointing to the "tempter" who wants nothing more than to destroy heartfelt prayer. The battle is real... with challenges to "go check emails" or the smartphone *before*, or *instead of*, turning to prayer. Laura fights it, reclaiming prayer even when distractions pop up.

"If I can sneak away and go to my own adoration, or just spend time in church,"

Laura explains, "these moments allow me to persist in prayer."

"Starting my day with prayer sets it up with intention," she says, implying that a good start influences everything else.

"Telling Him what I want and need, who I'm worried about," but also *listening* to Him, she assures.

"He calms my heart and lets me know He has me, He has it all," she trusts, turning to a favorite verse, Isaiah 55:8: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.*"

"I know His plans are better than mine, and so I trust Him, even though I don't always understand," Laura maintains.

4 MEANINGFUL PRAYERS

Laura lists several prayers that are part of her daily prayer practice along with impromptu prayers of gratitude. The *Healing Prayer of Surrender*, *Our Father*, and *Hail Mary* stop her — she pauses often to focus on what she is saying and to open her heart to the "meaningful prayers that they are."

"If people immerse themselves in the meaning of the words, it *changes everything*," Laura asserts, referring to a troubling

conversation she once had. The exchange went like this.

"You guys just recite your prayers and it doesn't mean anything."

"Have you listened to the prayers? Do you understand what they mean?" Laura asked.

Even the suggestion of rote, hurried prayers, empty of meaning, struck her hard. The truth, beauty and meaning of prayers must be understood for what they are — *dialogue with God, with Mary*, in praise, thanksgiving, contrition and petition.

"We have to really stop and think about what we're saying" in our prayers, Laura expresses with concern.

"Our prayers are like reading poetry to God," Laura imparts, stressing that prayers have the power to change us, keeping us "close to Him and safe from the world." ✚

1 SHOW UP

"You always have to show up," the long-time parishioner insists, revealing what she has come to know after a lifetime of prayer.

"I've been Catholic my whole life, and I've prayed my whole life," she explains, peering back to see herself as a child, reminiscing, searching and finding the key — that is, *showing up for God*.

"I feel like my prayers as a child were innocent. Those were the best," she recalls, pinpointing how they were "the least cluttered... no pretense, *you know?* Just you and God."

Recognizing this, Laura finds tranquility in the days when silent prayer leads her heart. "Just sitting with Him, there is a peace that comes," she conveys, hearing God say to her, "we don't always have to talk, but we do always have to be together."

2 ALL DAY LONG

Laura carves out time for prayer every morning but stresses, "You have to remind yourself constantly that God doesn't just come and sit with you in the morning. He stays all day."

The season of Lent invites us to fully engage in the pillars of piety:

- Prayer
- Fasting
- Almsgiving



Desert Father, St. Anthony *the Great* inspires **F**ASTING for Aphiah Cey-Jude

Aphiah Cey-Jude knew in an instant the saint who inspired his commitment to fasting – **St. Anthony the Abbot**, also known as **St. Anthony the Great**. (Not the

famed 13th-century Franciscan friar from Portugal, and later Padua, noted as the patron of lost articles.)

“Anthony of the desert,” Aphiah begins, offering clips and snippets of this 4th-century monk, “is a Desert Father.” Having read St. Athanasia’s biography, *The Life of Anthony*, Aphiah summarizes the saint as “the archetype for asceticism and monasticism.”

“Not just for me,” Aphiah adds, surmising that all the participants in Exodus 90 (*a spiritual program offered by the Soldiers of St. Michael the Archangel men’s ministry*) might feel the same about this saintly role model.

Reading about his life story helped Aphiah to get to know about Anthony’s “zeal and commitment” to go out into the wilderness but only after selling off his inheritance and ensuring the care and well-being of his sister.

“Then, he just said, ‘Forget everything in the world...I’m all in for Jesus,’” Aphiah paraphrases on the monk’s unyielding dedication. “That was something that really enamored me about him,” Aphiah verifies.

“I wanted to do some type of ascetic practice,” Aphiah says, indicating that Exodus 90 offers discretion and accountability. “We are not alone in the desert,” he assures, referring to how the three-month period naturally is peppered with lots of “spiritual battles.”

The temptations of the demons aim to throw participants off their fasts and minimize progress on the road to holiness.

“When you fast, you refocus the appetite away from things that are not as important as God,” Aphiah explains, mentioning the intention to “sharpen the iron” and put lesser things in their place, and “appreciate higher things, *more*.”

Exodus 90 guides more than 70 men in the effort that began early in January and continues through Lent.

“I’ve always kept the fasts of the Church, and I’ve done the ‘Daniel Fast,’ too,” Aphiah shares, suggesting that the fruitful refocusing of fasting is necessary for humans. “It helps us to refocus our priority on God.”

The Exodus 90 program encourages a variety of concurrent fasts and not solely fasting from food.

Aphiah describes recommended food fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, but daily fasting from snacks, sweets, sweet drinks, alcohol, extra screen time and excessive purchases. Instead, Aphiah fills the voids with God.

“I need to pray. It’s fruitful,” he assures, conceding that all the forfeitures of fasting are superfluous. “I don’t need all those things; I need to focus my dependence on God,” Aphiah says.

Exodus 90 pairs each participant with another to serve as an “anchor.” Regular communication and “check-ins” fuel the ascetic lifestyle with strength throughout the 90-day journey.

Aphiah and his anchor have also chosen to read St. Theresa of Avila’s, *Interior Castle*, inspired by her own emphasis on spiritual detachment as a means to spiritual growth.

Aphiah has shared his story of faith at Mass and gives thanks for his return to the Catholic Church. He lived in the Philippines and traveled Asia with his wife, Angel, returning to the United States in December 2023. He conveys that the beautiful, enduring faith of his *Nana* pulled at his heart.

“I would take her to Mass and to confession and I knew... her faith led me,” he acknowledges, continuing, “I thought, *I need confession*. And that opened the floodgates for me.”

“Good Shepherd drew us in” after settling in Elk Grove, Aphiah recalls

of their decision to call this parish “home.” Aphiah and Angel have three beautiful young children under the age of four – a boy and two girls.

When not seeking inspiration for fasting, Aphiah admits he turns to his own litany of saints for all kinds of inspiration.

“Well, I ask for intercession a lot. From my namesake, St. Jude... my confirmation name. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, is a kind of family saint. Padre Pio. St. Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine. St. Joseph, of course. St. Faustina and the Divine Mercy devotion. St. Catherine of Siena, because I have always had a strong fondness for her. Origen and my birthday saint, St. Hildegarde. St. Robert Bellarmine, Joan of Arc, and of course, Mother Mary,” Aphiah offers, hinting this may not be an exhaustive list!

And how can it be when there is “*a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice:*

“Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:9

Holy saints, pray for us!



WHAT A JOY IT IS TO BE SIMMERING SAINTS, SIMMERING APOSTLES, SIMMERING MARTYRS.

– Blessed Mario Borzaga

VISION

THE CHURCH WANTS US "TO BE OUR BEST AND FULLEST SELVES"

Father Alex Llanera, SJ, discusses SUNDAY MASS and the call to live differently

Every so often, Good Shepherd parish enjoys the visits and preaching of Father Alex Llanera, SJ. He refers to this community as his "home parish," having grown up in Elk Grove, graduated from Sacramento's Jesuit High School, and then moved on to college and seminary.

January was no different when he arrived for several Masses over three weekends. Taking a break from his doctoral studies in Madrid, Spain, he seemed happy to share insights on the first goal presented in the newly released parish plan — **Making Sunday Mass a Priority.**

I think this is about coming to terms with what worship is," Father Alex suggests, opening the door for deeper thought. What is the experience of Mass? The theology?

"It really is our *intended* nature," he adds, stating that worship is "our ability to reorient our entire focus and self towards God." It is what God intends, that His children "praise, reverence and serve" Him

and that they do so "with our whole heart," the Jesuit father affirms.

"And so, worship, *good worship that's done well*, is about that reorientation completely towards God," he summarizes before landing on the difficult truth. Sin. "We're working against our own sinful nature to try to reorient ourselves back to that pre-fall" state of existence, according to Father Alex, referencing humanity's anthropological history rooted in Adam and Eve's original sin.

Turning to the sacred tablets that God gave to Moses, Father Alex explains God's early work to reorient humankind towards God. Further, God emphasizes the importance of rest with the fourth commandment: "**Remember the sabbath day — keep it holy.**"

In four powerful verses (Exodus 20: 8-11), "God is showing us that rest is important,"

(Continues from page 4)

"I really want to go to Mass," Steve shares, giving a list of other heartfelt motivations. "I want to get there early. I want to get a good seat so I can really hear the message. I want to connect with other people," he continues.

"A big element of Mass is community," he stresses of the communal nature of worship. Coming before God, "we help each

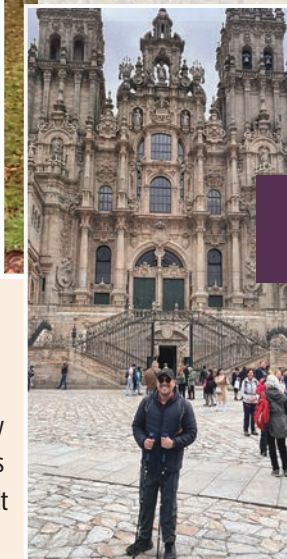
other, support each other and encourage each other," he conveys, alluding to the need to be there because it is good, and right, and part of God's loving plan.

"When you connect with people who are there, you form relationships, friendships," Steve confides. The experience of Mass becomes "much more a part of your life and something you look forward to."

"Sunday worship is our opportunity to ENCOUNTER an unfettered, unfiltered, and unconditional love of God. And by doing so, it gives us the freedom to live as our best selves.

Why wouldn't we want to experience that every Sunday?"

Father Alex Llanera, SJ



Father Alex trekking the distance in Spain, on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. At left, before Santiago de Compostela Cathedral. While starting solo, Father Alex gladly became the unofficial chaplain to about a dozen young pilgrims thrilled to connect with a priest for daily Mass.

Father Alex explores. "In worship, we encounter rest... silence... prayer, and each of those is really important," he holds firm, encouraging deeper thought on the labor of God in creation but also the necessity of recuperation, rejuvenation and reflection.

"The Church says that worship allows us to be our best and fullest selves," Father shares, intimating that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass should be recognized in the purest sense, as the Church's loving act to help orient us to God.

"When we're worshipping in the right way, we're developing a habit, and we do it regularly, we actually increase our freedom because we are more aware of 1) who we are, 2) what we've been created

to do, and 3) how to properly love God and others," Father Alex explains.

Jesus — *incarnate in the priesthood, teaching in the Word, all around us in the community, and before us in the Real Presence in the Eucharist* — all these amount to the *greatest gift* according to the beloved visiting priest. Mass is the most powerful and tangible sacrament of love.

"How is that going to change your life? How are you going to live differently? YOU are a living tabernacle," Father says gently and expressively, prompting a sense of responsibility.

"The gifts that we receive in Christ, both in Word and sacrament, transform us and change us," Father Alex asserts, asking, "How are you preparing yourself to receive Jesus? And what will you do once you do receive him?" ✚

OWNING THE GOALS — As the parish plan came to fruition, parish council members realized that achieving the "ideal state" meant sharing responsibility with parishioners for the "five-year goals."

"The first three bullet points depend on guidance from the pastoral leadership," Steve says, while the remaining three points should inspire the laity to engage

and participate. "The laity are asked to dig deep and recognize we all have a responsibility" in putting these initiatives in motion, he posits.

"The hope is that this plan will be ingrained in the life of the parish," Steve concludes, and "not just a flavor" subject to the whims of change. ✚

GO MAKE DISCIPLES

Yasmin Castellanos

ALMSGIVING *An act of love*

Yasmin Castellanos, development and alumni relations director for St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School (SEAS), helps the larger Good Shepherd parish community consider almsgiving. What is it?

Most often understood as charitable giving to the poor and needy, Yasmin breaks it down even further to pinpoint and spotlight the fruit-bearing nature of giving alms.

"This is really an act of love," Yasmin says of almsgiving, leaving behind any undue pressure or sense of obligation. Instead, she explains, it is *voluntary* giving, distinguished with great joy, generosity and free choice. It is the loving **response** of one presented with a meaningful appeal to the heart.

"It's a loving practice that we're participating in to make this world a better place," she adds, emphasizing how it is "something we truly feel."

A tug on the heart

Yasmin serves SEAS in a part-time capacity, splitting her time as a "shared resource" between this parish's largest ministry and Sacramento's St. Philomene Dual Language Catholic School, where she supports the school through its dual language program and advancement efforts. She also represents SEAS with a "dual" status, having once donned the hats of active parent and volunteer and now as part of the staff.

"I've always strongly believed, and continue to believe, in the school and everything it's done for our children," Yasmin expresses, going on to reveal the "feelings" of gratitude, if not zeal, she holds in her heart for the SEAS experience. "SEAS strengthened our family," Yasmin shares, describing "traditions which are a part of our story and our lives."

Yasmin describes SEAS as a perfect example among many ministries and needs that might benefit from the almsgiving of the faithful.

From supporting youth in their annual Jog-A-Thon

to intentional contributions to the school's Annual Fund (every August in celebration of Saint Elizabeth's birthday), school patrons are alms-GIVERS, generously giving, not from their surplus, but from the depths of their hearts, spiritually motivated to serve God and neighbor lovingly.

In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI helped frame an understanding of social charity, inspired by the gospel, as "*attentive to man's suffering and needs.*" He highlights the legitimate, aching reality of poverty and suffering among brothers and sisters AND the likewise valid temporal needs of organizations that build the kingdom in myriad ways but often lack resources.

"There's a gap," Yasmin says between the amount covered by tuition and the actual fixed costs of running the school. "There's no government funding," she continues, indicating a reliance on tuition, fundraising and stewardship efforts to operate a Catholic school optimally. And reliance is nothing less than "dependence on" or "trust in" others to fill the void.

"So, we ask our community members to be good stewards and to help us continue to form these young minds in Christ," Yasmin says.

A culture of discipleship

"We're forming compassionate Christ-centered youth who grow into adults, who serve God in the world," Yasmin punctuates, drawing a straight line to discipleship. Students go out and live Catholic Social Teaching, practice the Beatitudes, and engage in works of mercy.



"Our children are modeling this," Yasmin stresses. "When we give, our gifts are multiplied by the children, our students," she details, insisting "it does not have to be a big number."

"Even if we forgo one of our Starbucks coffees this week, all those pennies become dollars and those dollars ...they turn into big acts of love and service in the world."

"This is mission-centered," Yasmin says inferring that everything at SEAS is about "building God's kingdom." Tracking students' career trajectories over the years, Yasmin describes SEAS alumni as compassionate, morally-based people who truly want to "do good on this earth."

The SEAS 25-year-legacy buds flourishing fruit as alumni consistently choose to work as teachers, social workers, legal, medical and technical professionals, and many other service-minded occupations.

Almsgiving is fruit-bearing

Giving in support of worthy needs such as SEAS urges big-picture, big-Kingdom thinking. Yasmin presents a school vision to create more learning spaces and accommodate more students at SEAS, which serves the three Elk Grove parishes: Good Shepherd, St. Joseph,

SEAS Funding opportunities *Speak the language of discipleship, almsgiving*



Yasmin Castellanos mentions several ways that a donor/disciple might support the various needs at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School:

- **The Annual Fund** - "Close the gap" between tuition receipts and operating costs.
- **Day of Giving** - Support improvements and enhancements
- **Fundraising Events** - Invest in technology tools and classroom needs
- **Building our Future Fund** - Share in the vision of growth and potential new facilities
- **Athletics Fund** - Give to athletic programs that foster teamwork, discipline and perseverance
- **Legacy/Planned Giving** - Consider philanthropic strategies and contribute your assets

- **Ivan Castellanos Memorial Scholarship** - Give to this ongoing scholarship fund to help students/families who face significant medical needs.

"My son passed away five years ago," Yasmin shares, noting eight-year-old Ivan's struggle with a cancerous brain tumor. She recalls the weight of the illness and the desire to create some degree of normalcy for Ivan, allowing him to savor friends and community, and stay in school as long as possible.

"Perhaps a child is ill, or needing treatment. Or a parent. It affects the whole community," Yasmin imparts, knowing the relief that comes with scholarship monies in the face of mounting medical bills.

SEAS established this fund, with seed funds from Ivan's friends, to alleviate financial strains in these circumstances and preserve access to the faith, hope and love of the SEAS school community.

and St. Maria Goretti. In line with missionary discipleship, the school family hopes to invite more families into **COMMUNITY**, where everyone can **ENCOUNTER JESUS, ACCOMPANY** one another, and prepare to be **SENT** out into the world as apostles.

And for the cheerful giver? Almsgiving bears tangible fruit that leads hearts to spiritual growth. Voluntary stewardship, apart from weekly tithing in collections, unites the heart-felt giver with the recipient in a spirit of love, solidarity and compassion.

"We want our school to be here in 100 years," Yasmin exclaims knowing everything is possible with God whose grace works within us bearing fruit "day to day." ✝

Your privations shall bear fruit if you give generously to another...

Do you wish your PRAYER to reach God?

Give it two wings, FASTING and ALMSGIVING.

St. Augustine



Lent

A SEASON OF RENEWAL

Examining
**The Reason
for Our Hope** with
**FATHER
LARRY
RICHARDS**

**GOOD SHEPHERD CATHOLIC CHURCH
LENTEN PARISH MISSION**

BE RENEWED. MADE READY. SENT FORTH AS LIVING LIGHTS.

MARCH 9 - 12, 2026
Reserve these dates on your calendar!

**6:30 p.m.
In the church**

Monday, March 9 -
God's Love and Prayer

Tuesday, March 10 -
Love of Others,
in the context of a Mass

Wednesday, March 11 -
Passion of Christ/the need for Confession
(confessions follow)

Thursday, March 12 -
Adoration and Healing,
in the context of Eucharistic Adoration.

Gather in community with Father Larry Richards, renowned EWTN broadcaster, author and host of his popular podcast, *Anchored in Hope*.

As pastor of his own flock in the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, Father Larry captivates, inspires and renews the hearts and minds of young and old alike.

Father Larry's evening talks will help guide us through the wilderness of Lent to the light of the resurrected Christ.

*Always be ready...
to give an explanation...
to anyone who asks you...
for a reason for your hope.*

1 Peter 3:15






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Visit GSCCEG.org to learn more about upcoming events.

It is God who is at work within YOU...shine like stars in the world. *Philippians 2:13, 15*

In Community, we flourish



Fridays in March — Soup for the Soul

Gather on the six Fridays of Lent (2/20 through 3/27) for a simple meal of soup and bread. Each week, watch an episode of a thought-provoking documentary, **My father's Father**, and explore what it means to have a relationship with God the Father. Doors open at 5:45 p.m., Father Philip Wells Parish Hall.

Fridays in March — Stations of the Cross

Following Soup for the Soul, prayerful, clergy-led Stations of the Cross in the church at 7 p.m. Or, Wednesdays at 1:15 p.m. beginning Feb. 25 with St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School.



March 9-12 — Lenten Mission with Father Larry Richards

Father Larry guides us through nightly talks engaging us in a transformative message as we move through the Lenten wilderness to the Light of the resurrected Christ. 6:30 p.m., nightly.

Encounter the Lord this Lent!

- Monday, 3/9 — **God's Love & Prayer**
- Tuesday, 3/10 — **Love of Others** (in the context of Mass)
- Wednesday, 3/11 — **Passion of Christ/the need for confession** (confessions follow)
- Thursday, 3/12 — **Adoration and Healing**, in the context of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

March 25 (Wednesday) — Communal Penance Service. Join in this meaningful evening, including time for individual confessions. **6:00 p.m.**

March 22 — Kinderchurch Easter Egg Hunt

- Following 9 a.m. Mass

March 29 — Palm Sunday

April 2-4 — Triduum

- Thursday, April 2, Mass of the Last Supper, 7:00 p.m.
- Friday, April 3, Good Friday

April 5 — Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord

Please consult the parish website and bulletins for details on all Triduum and Easter services. Visit: gscceg.org/lenteaster



My father's Father

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