The Catholic Citizen

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Why is it that Catholics assign the month of May to our Lady? What is it about this month of all the months in the year that makes us want to crown her with roses, and to fête her with tender hymns? In this issue, we feature the great Jesuit Victorian poet, **Gerard Manley Hopkins**, with some possible answers.

The May Magnificat

May is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
    Her feasts follow reason,
    Dated due to season—

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
    Why fasten that upon her,
    With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight her?
    Is it opportunest
    And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
    Question:What is Spring?—
    Growth in every thing—

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all together;
    Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
    Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
Forms and warms the life within;
    And bird and blossom swell
    In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
    With that world of good,
    Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind
With delight calls to mind
    How she did in her stored
    Magnify the Lord.

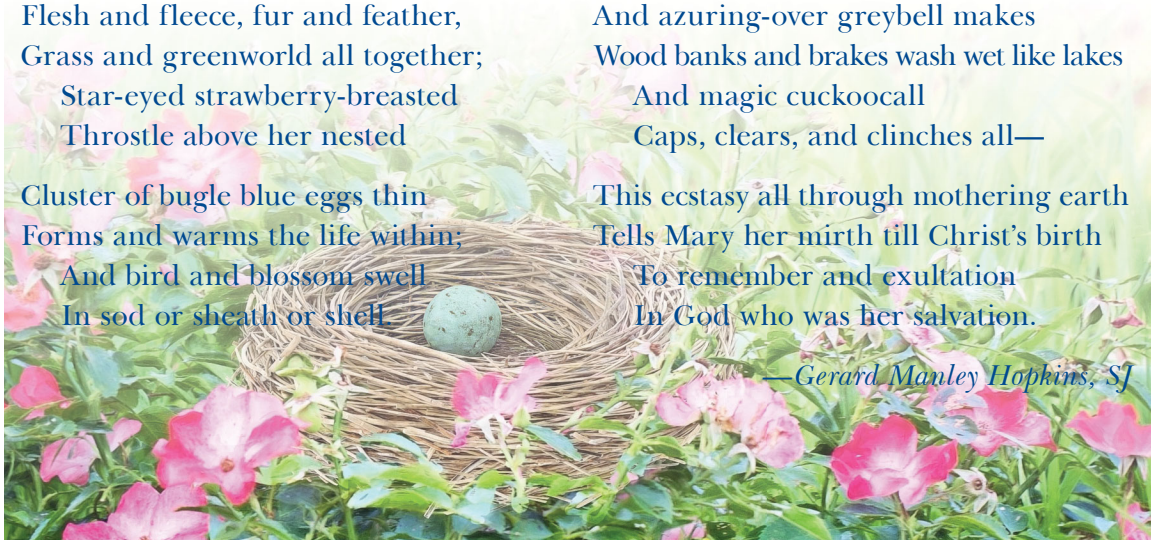
Well but there was more than this:
Spring's universal bliss
    Much, had much to say
    To offering Mary May.

When drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple
Bloom lights the orchard-apple
    And thicket and thorp are merry
    With silver-surfed cherry

And azuring-over greybell makes
Wood banks and brakes wash wet like lakes
    And magic cuckoocall
    Caps, clears, and clinches all—

This ecstasy all through mothering earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's birth
    To remember and exultation
    In God who was her salvation.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ



Best Friends

Some of My Best Friends Are Catholic

When Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was 14 years old, his father took him to Rome. They went to the Sistine Chapel and heard something astonishing. The choir sang the *Miserere Mei, Deus* of Gregorio Allegri, a composer who had himself joined the Sistine Chapel choir in 1629. The work is a double-choir setting of Psalm 51 and is marked by a recurring solo line that soars above the choir to a high C. It is typically sung by a boy treble. Those high Cs make grown men weep.

For decades the *Miserere* was sung in the chapel each year during Holy Week. Crowds would flock to hear it, and the Vatican knew it had a good thing, so they kept the score under wraps. Along came young Mozart, whose ear was so superior that on the single hearing he sat down that night and wrote out the piece. The jig was up. The work is now sung worldwide during Holy Week. It is a sublime example of the beauty that springs from Catholicism.

The Catholic Church has been much in the news in recent years. Oceans of ink were spilled on the election of Pope Leo, for example. Long may he live.

It's curious that so many *non*-Catholics are interested in the election of a pope, judging from the massive coverage in secular news outlets. In the same way that many Americans eagerly consume news of the British monarchy with all its formalities, they consume news of the Vatican with its ritual and beauty, its white smoke and incense. These offer relief from our ever-more-casual culture. That's why so many people rise in the wee hours to watch real-time coverage of coronations and conclaves. Apparently we need transcendence.

If the Catholic Church had a PR office in downtown Chicago and I were chief, here are some talking points I would address in particular to "nones," meaning persons who reply on surveys that they subscribe to no faith at all. Why? Someday they'll need it. It's easy to be a "none" when things are going well, but I have observed hardened organized-religion-scoffers sing like canaries for a priest when a loved one lay dying. Faith shields you when misfortune strikes.

As PR man, I would first make public a list of notable Catholics. Mozart was one. He despised the archbishop who was long his employer, so many assume he hated the church. Not true. He got on well with most other clerics, and recognized with his father that his genius was God-given. Despite his ribald ways and earthy sense of humor Mozart was a lifelong Catholic, as his own letters make clear. When his mother died suddenly he was bereft. "And yet God, in his mercy, bestowed on me the grace I needed," he wrote to his father. William Shakespeare had deep ties to the Catholic underground in Elizabethan England, and his plays are sprinkled with double meanings signaling allegiance to the faith, though suppression was so severe at the time he could not possibly profess it. It can't be proved, but the evidence is strong. So, at the top of the list: Mozart and very likely, Shakespeare.

Walker Percy, Edwin O'Connor and of course Flannery O'Connor are some of the modern writers on the list, along with Ernest Hemingway, a two-time convert.

On the big screen, Spencer Tracy, Gregory Peck, Walter Brennan, Alec Guinness, Maureen O'Hara and Rosalind Russell were all Catholic, as was director John Ford. Both John Wayne and Gary Cooper converted to Catholicism later in life. It was Hemingway who influenced his friend Gary Cooper to convert. Later, when Cooper was on his deathbed, Hemingway visited him and found him lying there, clutching a crucifix. Cooper thanked his friend for steering him to the faith, with words to the effect of "It was the best thing you ever did for me."

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Jazz pianist and composer Dave Brubeck, best known for "Take Five," was received into the Catholic Church at around sixty years of age, after exploring it for decades.

Men of science also appear. Louis Pasteur, the inventor of pasteurization, wrote "Posterity will one day laugh at the sublime foolishness of the materialistic philosophy. The more I study nature, the more I stand amazed at the work of the Creator." Examples abound of distinguished priest-scientists over time. Gregor Mendel, the father of genetics, was an Augustinian monk. Copernicus was not only a lifelong Catholic, he earned a doctorate in canon law. After his death the church banned his book placing the sun at the center of the solar system and yes, the church famously placed the Catholic Galileo on lifetime house arrest for his defense of Copernican heliocentrism (sun at the center), though its viewpoint was shared by most educated people at the time. But they reversed in 1835, after more evidence came to light. Is the church on earth perfect? No. It's composed of human beings. Ironically, the Vatican Observatory today is one of the top institutions of astronomy in the world.

The greatest *artists* in human history are on the list, too: Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini.

Which brings us to beauty. Were I granted only one talking point as the church's PR man it would be the beauty it offers, which reaches the deepest places in the human heart. The art, the architecture and especially, the music. I happen to like the Latin Mass. I am not a terrorist. Why do I like it? The beauty. And even as a little girl, I came quickly to understand it; not every word, but the important ones. The finest choral works ever composed are settings of Latin texts. Latin vowels are pure. A chord sung well in tune on a pure vowel multiplies the harmonic overtones like light hitting a prism at just the right angle, making that chord ring. (Less so in English, with its chewy dipthongs.) To hear a good choir sing the *Allegri Miserere* in a beautiful church is so transcendent it's best not spoken of. It gives us a tiny glimpse of heaven. This viewpoint is not elitist. We want good music for the same reason that chalices are made of gold or silver.

An illiterate medieval peasant, no elitist, could gaze at the stained-glass windows of Chartres Cathedral and understand that the faith was important.

In this writing I refer not to the diluted form of Catholicism now so prevalent in the United States, what papal biographer George Weigel calls Catholic Lite, which though valid is aesthetically as a Hallmark card to the Mona Lisa. No, I refer to the genuine article, with all its beauty and wisdom: full-strength, red-meat Catholicism that G.K. Chesterton likened to "a heavenly chariot [flying] thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect."

When Chesterton himself converted, his friend Maurice Baring, an English man of letters, wrote to him. "I was received into the church on the eve of Candlemas, 1909, and it is perhaps the only act which in my life I am quite certain I have never regretted," he wrote. "Every day I live, the church seems to me more and more wonderful, the Sacraments more and more solemn and sustaining; the voice of the church, her liturgy, her rules, her discipline, her ritual, her decisions in matters of faith and morals more and more excellent and profoundly wise … "

Enter St. Peter's in Rome and you immediately realize that it is about something important. Such architecture is no accident; the building alone makes you think of Things Eternal. Or visit a Byzantine Rite Church where the choir is singing Rachmaninoff. Those low basses recall to you that you have a soul.

In a highly competitive society, church is one place where you're valued as a human

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Nine Benefits of Going to Confession Frequently

by Fr. Wade L. J. Menezes, CPM

During my priestly ministry, I have discerned several reasons why people hesitate to approach the Sacrament of Confession. Here are the most common:

- **Fear:** Though the vast majority of priests are kind and understanding confessors, many potential penitents fear being judged or scolded.
- **Pride:** Confessing sins means confronting that we've genuinely done wrong and need God's help to heal. Our personal pride rebels against this.
- **Shame:** Though a well-ordered guilt should impel us to the Sacrament of Confession, shame can keep us away because of the realization that we have to admit our sins to another—and speaking our sins out loud feels unbearable.
- **Ignorance:** This is twofold. First, we can be ignorant of the reality of sin in our lives and its devastating consequences if it goes unchecked. Second, we can be ignorant of the necessity of sacramental confession for the forgiveness of mortal sins.
- **Unavailability:** Too often there simply aren't enough times offered for confession at local parishes, or there is no option for anonymity, which is the right of every penitent according to the church's discipline of this sacrament.

... Recall that the grace of the sacrament can protect us from sin by strengthening our resolve and reforming our habits. So, although we are required by church law to go to confession at least once a year if we are conscious of mortal sin, we still benefit from the time-honored tradition of going monthly (say, on First Friday in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or on First Saturday in honor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary). A faithful, monthly penitent most likely never, or at least infrequently, has mortal sin to confess, because the fervent practice

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being, not for how you perform. How refreshing is that? A dignified church also offers something else we need on occasion: silence. "Music and silence—how I detest them!" declares the senior devil to his pupil in C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. "We [demons] will make the whole universe a noise in the end."

To be Catholic in some circles today is like what being gay used to be. Revealing it invites social persecution. No matter. Yet people who are spiritual-but-not-religious often themselves create faith substitutes, such as an extreme fixation on health or environmentalism. As to those who are virulently hostile to the church for its many sins, well, sometimes the vehemence of their protests tells you they know it's true.

I have omitted the topic of the church's rich intellectual heritage, one so vast that it can't be included here. But one last point. The Catholic Church is not only the most sensual of religions, with its incense and oils, chant and candlelight—it's *fun*. We drink, dance and have lots of babies.

How utterly blessed we are to be Catholic.

Miss Terry Sullivan is a long-time friend to Catholic Citizens of Illinois, associate director of Midtown-Metro Achievement Centers in Chicago, jazz chanteuse and free-lance writer. This essay was originally published at johnkass-news.com and has been adapted by the author for Catholic Citizens of Illinois.

Benefits *continued from page 4*

of monthly confession keeps him from committing mortal sin. And remember that Pope Pius XII recommended the practice of frequent confession, even if only venial sins are in question:

> By it, genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself. *Mystici Corporis Christi, no. 88.*

Here we see nine benefits of the sacrament, whether it be just venial sins or mortal sins, or a combination, that are confessed.

Let's look briefly at each of these benefits:

Self-knowledge is increased

Many saints make clear in their writing and teaching that self-knowledge is needed to grow in holiness. This means knowing and admitting your virtues so you can advance them in your life, and knowing and admitting your vices so you can uproot them out of your life.

Christian humility grows

> Humility is the "moral virtue that keeps a person from reaching beyond himself. It is the virtue that restrains the unruly desire for personal greatness and leads people to an orderly love of themselves based on a true appreciation of their position with respect to God and their neighbors," *Fr. John Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary.*

Not only does the practice of frequent confession help us to grow in humility, but the very act of making a good examination of conscience (required before even stepping into the confessional) is humbling—and it helps us to grow in self-knowledge.

Bad habits are corrected

Little by little, through frequent confession and honesty with one's confessor, who will offer advice accordingly, bad habits can be overcome. Frequent, worthy reception of the Sacrament of Confession means frequent graces received from that sacrament for those bad habits.

Spiritual neglect is resisted

Let's say you are struggling to establish the practice of praying the daily Rosary or daily Chaplet of Divine Mercy, or even just making a morning offering upon rising each day. Your failures to practice these devotions would be examples of "spiritual neglects" that cause your spiritual life to suffer. Frequent confession can help you get back on track, especially if your confessor assigns them to you as a penance and so you begin to carry them out more faithfully on your own.

Spiritual tepidity is resisted

Let's say you do, indeed, carry out such spiritual practices—but only infrequently. In other words, you carry them out in a tepid or lukewarm manner. The graces from frequent confession can help ignite a renewed spiritual fervor that will help make your daily spiritual life grow stronger and more committed every day.

Conscience is purified

Confession of one's sins brings with it a purification and, importantly, peace of conscience. This is tied to the healing aspect of confession. Indeed, confession is one of two "healing" sacraments, along with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

The will is strengthened

Whereas our intellect is what helps us "to know," our will is what helps us "to choose" (based on properly ordered love). Through the practice of frequent confession, our wills become strengthened to help us more frequently choose good over evil, virtue over vice, and the beneficial over the malicious.

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Only you can control you. Frequent Confession makes us simply want to "do better" in all aspects of daily living.

St. Bernadette of Lourdes and the Lady of Cambrai Icon

Although the artistic genre of the religious icon is associated more closely with Eastern Catholic or Orthodox churches than with the Roman Catholic Church, Christians of all denominations cannot but be moved by the beauty, gravity and mystery of this tradition. The "writing" of an icon (icons are said to be "written" rather than "painted") is a process governed by strict principles of spiritual discipline, formal composition and conventional types. Unlike most Western art, the images we see in icons do not resemble their subjects in a visually realistic way.

One of the reasons for this is that the icon writer does not attempt to depict its subject as he or she appeared in life. Rather, the icon offers a "window into heaven" and purports to capture the appearance of the person—a saint or Our Lord Himself—in glory. His or her face is impassive—that is to say, not disturbed by the passions or affected by physical debility. There is no apparent source of light nor are there shadows. The perspective is not such as we admirers of the Renaissance geniuses have come to expect in fine art. We are accustomed to the spatial realism of linear perspective, pioneered by Filippo Brunelleschi, which places a point of convergence *behind* the depicted scene—on the far side of the image from the viewer. Objects nearer the viewer appear larger and those in the distance appear smaller, as they do in direct vision. On a Byzantine icon, however, the point of convergence is centered on the viewer—in *front* of the plane of the icon. This creates the disorienting impression that it is not the viewer who is looking at the icon, but rather that the icon is "looking" at him. Another effect of this reverse perspective is that it draws the viewer—the Christian praying with the icon—into the presence of the subject. In the Byzantine tradition, the faithful do not just *look* at the icon; they *venerate* the icon.

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Divine Tenderness



In his book, *Picasso's Mask*, the former French minister of culture André Malraux recounted a story he had told to the famous Spanish artist concerning Bernadette Soubirous, the seer of Lourdes. The Virgin Mary had appeared to her 18 times, and the site of the apparitions, the grim grotto of Massabielle, across the River Gave, had been transformed into a place of wonder and hope through the appearance of a miraculous spring. Afterward, the peasant girl entered the Convent of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers. While in the cloister, the saint was to receive pictures and statues of the Virgin from the faithful the world over, but she would throw them into a closet where she wouldn't have to look at them. Dumbfounded, the Mother Superior asked Bernadette why she would do such a thing. Bernadette replied that none of the images looked like the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she could not abide to meditate on images that were not true. This motivated the Mother Superior to write to the bishop who came to the convent with large picture books filled with all the well-known images of the Virgin. He showed the simple nun, who had never seen great art, images of Mary as painted by such masters as Raphael and Murillo. But Bernadette shook her head at all of them. Then as they were flipping through the pages at random, they came upon an

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Bernadette *continued from page 6*

In light of the foregoing, the following essay by Fr. Michael Morris, OP, published originally in *Magnificat* magazine of February 2008, is particularly interesting. Legend attributes this icon of Our Lady of Cambrai, in the genre of depictions of the Blessed Mother under the title Eleousa—Virgin of Tenderness, to the hand of St. Luke himself based upon his close relationship with Mary. The following essay refers to the more recent accounts of St. Bernadette of Lourdes which testify to its actual resemblance to our Lady. As we approach our Lady's month of May, we are happy to share this remarkable story.



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image of an icon venerated in the town of Cambrai. Falling on her knees, Bernadette exclaimed to the bishop that the face she saw in that icon looked just like the face she had seen in the grotto so many times before. Malraux and Picasso then conjured as to how a simple, uneducated girl with no sophistication could possibly have seen the face of a real person in a painting that lacked depth, movement, and realistic illusion. Malraux surmised, and Picasso agreed, that there was some numinous element in primitive art that knocked on the very door of the sacred in essence. Bernadette, who had never before seen an icon, once again came face to face with the divine.

The icon can be traced back to 1440 when it was brought from Rome to Cambrai [in France]. St. Luke was reputed to have painted it, and so it was accordingly venerated and copied. Yet its Italo-Byzantine style dates it to the first part of the 14th century, placing it far from the first century of the Christian era. What is most probably true is that the icon itself is a copy of an earlier painting now lost in the mists of time. It nevertheless exudes a spiritual power of its own, one that attracted Bernadette's eye and made her drop to her knees.

In the Byzantine tradition, this type of icon is known as the Virgin *Eleousa* which highlights the affection and intimacy between mother and child. Mary holds the Christ child close to her face. They press against each other cheek to cheek. The divine infant places his hand on her chin and clutches her blue veil. She supports his back and bottom with her own hands in a loving embrace. This display of affection becomes all the more poignant when one thinks of the child's destiny and how the Blessed Mother will one day hold her son's broken and dead body in the *Pietà*. But here, for now, time and space are erased in a gilt background of serene repose and happiness. The compassion and tenderness that underscore the *Eleousa* icons is resplendent here. The stars on Mary's shoulders and brow are ancient symbols of virginity. This is the *Theotokos*, the Christ bearer, the Mother of God, portrayed in a most natural and loving way. Perhaps this is the loving quality that struck Bernadette when she first saw the image. Was hers an emotional response to a profoundly intellectual idea? When Mary revealed herself to the peasant girl in her native dialect, saying to her, "I am the Immaculate Conception," Bernadette had no notion of what these words even meant. She had to ask her parish priest for an explanation, and her naiveté bolstered the credibility of her vision. Hardened skeptics like Emile Zola would rail against the phenomenon of Lourdes, and yet the crowds grew in number year after year making the shrine the greatest Christian pilgrimage destination in all of human history.

Bernadette wanted a duplicate of the icon placed in the grotto, but a

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Falling on her knees, Bernadette exclaimed to the bishop that the face she saw in that icon looked just like the face she had seen in the grotto so many times before.

History's Greatest Victory Chant —The Easter Exsultet

Great victories in battle throughout history have always generated great victory songs to celebrate them. The Old Testament features one of those songs from an event that should be familiar to us even if the song isn't. When God drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea, Moses stood on the banks looking down on the dead soldiers and sang out,

> *I will sing to the LORD,*
> *for he is gloriously triumphant;*
> *horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.*
> *My strength and my refuge is the LORD,*
> *and he has become my savior.*
> *This is my God, I praise him;*
> *the God of my father, I extol him.*
> *The LORD is a warrior,*
> *LORD is his name! (Exodus 15:1-3)*

Moses' song goes on for 21 verses and was a perpetual reminder to the Hebrew nation that God had saved his people from slavery in Egypt.

Everything about the Resurrection radiates the glorious victory Christ won on Calvary, and for that reason, Easter has its own song, which is the most beautiful song the Church has to offer!

Exulting in Christ's victory



Christians have a victory song too because in a very literal sense, *Easter is an astonishing triumph*. It is the final result of an epic battle between God and Satan, between light and darkness, life and death. It is *our* perpetual reminder that God has saved us from spiritual slavery in Egypt, namely, sin, by sending his Son to do battle for our souls.

Everything about the Resurrection radiates the glorious victory Christ won on Calvary, and for that reason, Easter has its own song, which is the most beautiful song the church has to offer!

The ancient hymn of the church is called the Easter *Exsultet,* that latter term being the first word of the Latin hymn, "Let [the host of heaven] exult," It is also called the Easter Proclamation (Latin: *Praeconium*) emphasizing its character as a public declaration of victory and solemn prayer.

As is the case with so many Catholic prayers, its roots lie in the deep, rich soil of the ancient tradition. It is believed to have been composed somewhere between the third and fifth centuries, although the form we have today may be an accumulation of prayers and liturgical refinements of many and various religious cultures throughout Christian history. It was known to St. Augustine in the fifth century and found expression in many ancient sacramental texts.

Above all, the *Exsultet* is a prayer that communicates grace to the faithful soul. Writing at the website Catholic Culture, Dom Jerome Gassner, O.S.B., expressed this sentiment quite beautifully:

> The *Exsultet* is a most solemn sacramental …. Since the effect of a sacramental is dependent upon the intention of the church as expressed in the solemnity of the rite and in the terms of the prayers, the *Exsultet* is without doubt a very great sacramental, productive of an abundance of spiritual and temporal graces. It is a sacramental preparation and a disposing for a happy celebration of Easter, which is to climax in the Easter Eucharist, the resurrection of the souls—with Christ.

The Easter Vigil

The *Exsultet* is always and only sung at the Easter Vigil (the Mass on the night of Holy Saturday after darkness has fallen). After the Easter fire has been lit to begin the liturgy, the priest lights the large and ornate Paschal Candle, and from there the faithful light their candles and spread

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Chant *continued from page 8*

the flames one to another throughout the church as the priest enters the church in solemn procession. This gesture symbolizes the gathering light of Christ entering into and conquering the darkness.

Once the Paschal Candle is in place in the sanctuary, a deacon takes up his position at the podium and sings the Easter Proclamation which lasts about 10 minutes.

There is much to be said about the structure and theology behind the *Exsultet,* but our purpose here is less erudite. We simply want to bask in its immense beauty! I will only point out two highlights to help you appreciate the beauty of this sublime prayer.

Light and darkness

The deep mystical grace of this hymn lies in the way it draws a contrast between darkness and light in a poetic fashion. There are numerous occurrences of the word "night" which highlight seven types of night—*did you know there were that many types of night?!*

The deacon sings of the **three nights** of the Exodus event (the night of Passover, the night when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, the dark night of the desert). All were illuminated by the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites through the darkness. The biblical pillar of fire is an image of the Paschal Candle in whose presence he sings these praises.

He follows these references by singing of **four victories** of Christ's Resurrection over the spiritual darkness of the world. Listen especially for the deacon to sing the formulaic phrase, *This is the night …* (in Latin: *Haec nox est …*) to introduce these seven images.

The seven "night" references are balanced with seven "light" references in the song. The focus, of course, is on the concrete symbol of the flame of the Paschal Candle standing tall before the pulpit. There is even a delightful reference to the humble bee who produces the wax for the candle! The deacon celebrates the life-giving powers its light symbolizes.

The most beautiful aspect of the *Exsultet,* though, is the gorgeous imagery it uses to put man's redemption by Christ into stark perspective. The images are riveting. Here are just two of them …

> *"O charity beyond all telling, to ransom a slave you gave away your Son …. O truly necessary*

> *"O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer …. O truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!"*

Essay originally published on the Sacred Windows website.

Divine *continued from page 7*

statue of the Virgin was placed there instead. Mary *had* told Bernadette that she could not promise her happiness in this life—only in the life to come.

But this story of the image of the Virgin does have a happy ending. On the day of the last apparition, July 16, 1858, Bernadette was prevented from going to the grotto by a police barricade. So she went to the other side of the River Gave where the Virgin appeared to her in spite of the barriers. Almost on the exact spot where she had prayed during that last vision, a modern church dedicated to St. Bernadette was consecrated in 1988. It is there that the French Conference of Bishops meets every fall. And it is there in the sanctuary of the church that a replica icon of Our Lady of Cambrai was placed, an image that Bernadette claimed was the truest image of the loving woman she had beheld in rapture.

Institute of Catholic Culture: An Invaluable Resource

The members and benefactors of Catholic Citizens of Illinois are a very educated, committed and curious group. Your regular attendance at our Forum luncheons and the eager and insightful questions you ask bespeak a hunger to learn more about our faith from reliably orthodox sources. You will be interested to know of an outstanding online resource offering an abundance of lectures on Catholic theology and practice, Church history, ancient and Christian philosophy and literature. In addition, the Institute of Catholic Culture (ICC) offers reflections and other events in keeping with the current liturgical season.

Over the two decades since its founding, the ICC has compiled thousands of hours of accessible yet challenging courses to which the educated Catholic may have recourse. Most of the courses are available to anyone who chooses to register. For certain courses, you will need to apply for admission, but I have yet to be denied admission. There is no charge for these lectures, but in justice, "the laborer is worthy of his wages," and it is only right to support the Institute's mission with donations according to your means. Students are encouraged to participate in the live lectures, but if that timing is not convenient, recordings and supplemental material are posted in the days following the live program for viewing at your convenience. ICC also runs an offshoot apostolate ministering specifically to religious sisters in training. The courses offered through the Magdala Apostolate have been adopted by many traditional women's orders for the formation of their postulants and novices.

I have benefited from many of these lectures and have many more saved for future viewing in my "stash" of courses. I strongly encourage you to have a look at this worthy online educational opportunity at https://instituteofcatholicculture.org/events

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Benefits *continued from page 5*

A salutary self-control is achieved

Only you can control you. Frequent confession makes us simply want to "do better" in all aspects of daily living. It's the grace of the sacrament that propels us to control our lives better by practicing an ordinate love toward persons, places, and things and not an inordinate, or disordered, love toward them.

Grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself

Every sacrament, when it is received worthily, increases sanctifying grace in the soul. For Eucharist and confession—the only two sacraments that can be received both repetitiously and frequently—this is especially true. In fact, the Sacrament of Confession can even help to perfect the grace of our baptism. This is because baptism, while wiping away the original sin we inherit from our first parents, also wipes away any personal sin (also called "actual sin") we might have (*i.e.*, any venial or mortal sin). Confession always helps rid us of personal sin.

We should add, though, that going to confession out of scrupulosity is not helpful to the penitent, nor is it the intention of the sacrament. Scrupulosity is seeing sin where there is no sin at all but rather, say, a simple fault; or, seeing mortal sin when, in reality, it is a venial sin. Indeed, scruples can stunt one's growth in the spiritual life. Don't be your own savior; let Jesus Christ be your Savior.

This essay appeared originally on the Catholic Exchange website.

Upcoming Speakers

- **Friday, April 10**—***To Tend and to Keep: The Joys and Challenges of the Catholic Homestead***—**Joe and Emily Sullivan** have joined legions of young faithful families in the Catholic "homestead" movement and run a small hog and chicken farm in New Hampshire. This talk will be of interest to all Catholics but may resonate particularly with young adults so please consider inviting your children and grandchildren to join us for this event.
- **Friday, May 8**—***What Shall We Ask from Our Lady on Our 250th Birthday***—**John Horvat,** vice-president of Tradition, Family and Property—On the 250th year of our nation's birth, America at the same time finds herself both (1) the most prosperous country in history, and (2) in the middle of a great moral crisis unlike any we have seen before. This presentation will deal with our needs as a nation—what we should ask from Our Lady and why we may be confident that she will come to our aid.
- **Friday, June 12**—Speaker pending
- **Friday, July 10**—***The Stone the Builders Rejected: How Catholic Patriots Helped Found America***—**Daniel Leroy** (author of book of the same title)—To kick off this year's anniversary celebrations, our speaker will shed light on the role of Catholic patriots both in the colonies and from France and Poland in the Revolutionary War.
- **August**—No Forum uncheon
- **Friday, Sept. 11—Fr. Thomas Koys,** pastor of St. James Sag Bridge Mission Church, author and historian, will speak about the life and imminent beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen.
- **Thursday, Oct.1**—***Annual Fundraising Dinner – Is Belief Believable?: Reasoning About God with C. S. Lewis and Jordan Peterson***—**Keynote speaker Prof. Christopher Kaczor** Prof. Christopher Kaczor is president of the American Catholic Philosophical Association and professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University. He is a prolific author on a broad range of topics. His bestselling book, Jordan Peterson, God and Christianity, explores the possible reasons behind Peterson's vast popularity and offers an authentic Catholic perspective on Peterson's writings.
- **Friday, Nov. 13**—***Misunderstandings about the Crusades***—**Historian Prof. Thomas Madden** of St. Louis University will discuss modern research confirming the grave threat posed by Islam in the Middle Ages and the defensive wars of the Crusades waged against it. In light of the current operations in Iran and the ongoing peril of radical Islam, this should be a particularly interesting and timely talk.
- **Friday, Dec. 11** (date subject to change)—***The Incarnational Beauty of Hearth & Field***—**Matthew Giambrone,** publisher of *Hearth & Field* magazine, will talk about the Catholic inspiration for this beautiful new journal featuring thoughtfully written essays, stunning artistic images and gentle homey recommendations for living a fully human life and savoring the daily graces that God grants in our families, workplaces and communities.

Our Forum luncheons are held at the Carlisle Banquet Hall, 435 E. Butterfield Rd, Lombard, Ill. Parking is free. Check-in begins at 11:15. The luncheon and program begin promptly at noon. Professional attire is required. Reservations may be made at the CCI website or by calling 708-334-2627. Timely reservations are very much appreciated.

President's Report

by Madonna Muscarello

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Spring 2026 Update

My late beloved mother, Frances Jeanne Pacini Christensen, often said that the best gift her parents had given her was her Catholic faith. For decades, I found her words bewildering. The Catholic faith hardly seemed like a gift. Not that it was not a good thing. I always knew it was a *very good* thing, but it seemed a *given* rather than a *gift*. Everyone we knew was Catholic. Being Catholic just seemed so natural—*innate*—that it seemed superfluous to mention it. It would have been like giving thanks for having a nose. It just felt like one of the standard features of being a human being.

By the grace of God and the benefit of age and wisdom, each year reveals to me just how sage were my mother's words. Every new thing I learn about the Catholic faith is another reason to give thanks for being a Catholic. Everything fits into the *mosaic* of Catholicism. Perhaps the most compelling reason for being a Catholic is expressed in a beautifully tender way by the great British author GK Chesterton some years before his conversion to Catholicism. At the end of his apologetical masterwork *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton describes his childhood memories of strolling the family's gardens with his mother and father. There was much in the garden he did not understand as a child. What, for example, was the meaning and use of that twisted claw of metal affixed to the end of a wooden pole? His parents told him that it was a rake and that beautiful grass and flowers eventually would grow because of that ugly tool. And *they did*. His mother told him that ants would bite—and ants *did* bite. Amidst the warmth and bounty of summer, she told him that snow would come in winter—and, snow *did* come in winter. In Chesterton's words, "the whole world was to me a fairyland of wonderful fulfillments … where prophecy after prophecy came true." If one looks at the Church in a purely rational way, reading her Scriptures critically, hearing accounts of her miracles suspiciously, subjecting her sacraments to scientific scrutiny and reveling viciously in the foibles of her hierarchy, one fails to see the Church in her true light. But once we approach the Church as a *mother*, we see that, even where this or that doctrine or practice may be difficult to understand or explain, the Church, like Chesterton's mother—and my mother—*is a "truth-telling thing."* The Catholic Church teaches the truth about our natural lives and about our supernatural origin and destiny. As a result, we can trust her and give our lives to her. To be a member of that Church is indeed the greatest possible gift.

The Board of CCI was blessed to attend Mass recently at the St. John Paul II Newman Center Chapel at the University of Illinois Chicago on Tuesday, March 10. To our surprise and pleasure, the Mass was offered for the intentions of our organization. The chaplain Fr. Tim Anastos, wanting to introduce us to the dozens of students at Mass without unduly interfering with the progress of the liturgy, said that "CCI was *basically just saving the world*." We all chuckled at this extravagant encomium. But his remarks were not false, just exaggerated. To return to the grace of baptism with which I began this update, *every* baptized Christian is called to take up his or her cross and to be a co-worker with Christ for the salvation of the world. For us and for all of you, our supporters, friends and benefactors, we have been given a little patch of creation to evangelize and edify. If Fr. Anastos saw just a little of that effort in the work of CCI, we are doing our job. May we take our baptismal obligation seriously and strive every day to live and pray and speak and love with an eye and a heart to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

We remain grateful to you for your support of our organization and hope to see you regularly at our upcoming luncheons and annual dinner.

May God bless you and yours!

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us!



If you are inclined and able to support our efforts, we will be very grateful. You may send a personal check or donate through the general donation portal on our website Catholiccitizens.org by using this QR code. May God reward you for your kindness.