

A second legend identifies this site as the location where the Three Kings visited the Holy Family, and presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Divine Child. A tradition going back to the 7th century, located at this site the burial place of the innocent victims killed by Herod the Great after the birth of Jesus.

The Devotion to Our Lady of the Milk requests husbands and wives to pray together the third of the joyful mysteries of the rosary, meditating on the Nativity of the Lord.

The tradition of milk dates back to the first centuries of Christianity. Those converting to Christianity were given a mixture of milk and honey to drink, which in the early churches of Egypt, Rome, and North Africa was solemnly blessed at the Easter and Pentecost vigils. Milk with honey symbolized the union of the two natures in Christ. The custom of giving milk with honey to the newly baptized did not last long, but this tradition is visible in artistic representations.

The image of the Blessed Virgin Mary breastfeeding the infant Jesus dates back to the 16th century in the Spanish city of Madrid where she is called *Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto* (*Our Lady of the Milk and Happy Delivery*). In 1598, the image was rescued from irreverent hands and enthroned in the home of a married couple. The woman and her unborn child were to die and her husband prayed intently to our Lady of La Leche to grant his wife a safe delivery. Our Lady heard his prayer and thereupon, his dying pregnant wife and child were saved. Together, the couple spread the news to other families about our Lady's power with God. Soon after, the devotion became famous throughout Spain. Becoming aware of our Lady's intercession, King Philip III, who was the ruler during that time, personally undertook the erection of a shrine in honor of our Lady of La Leche.

More than twenty years later, the early Spanish settlers brought a replica to Colonial America and enshrined it at the Mission of Nombre de Dios in St. Augustine, Florida. It was the first shrine ever to be dedicated to the Blessed Mother in North America and was established on the very spot where the first parish Mass was offered 55 years earlier. The original chapel, built around 1615, was destroyed by gunfire during the colonial days and later, by a hurricane. The present chapel now houses a replica of the original statue that was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War of March 13, 1936.

On December 5, of 2015, the Most Reverend Felipe Estevéz, Bishop of St. Augustine bestowed a special privilege on the parish of St. Madeleine Catholic Church by designating the renovated chapel The Santa Fe Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche. This allowed for the faithful in the western-most reaches of the diocese who have a devotion to Our Lady to have a place of pilgrimage and spiritual refuge without the need to travel to St. Augustine.

Our Lady of La Leche, Pray for Us!

Santa Fe Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche



Novena Prayer and Consecration to Our Lady of La Leche

How to pray this novena: A novena is a traditional Catholic prayer that continues for nine days and is intended to ask for a particular favor or blessing, or to give thanks for blessings received. To make this novena sing the opening hymn, then meditate on the scripture passage, read the reflection, and pray the prayer followed by an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be...

Opening Hymn: (Sung to the tune of *What Child is This?*)

1. O Holy Mother I come to you,
As your child I pour out my deepest needs.
I know you hear my every cry,
And tenderly hold me near.

Refrain: *Praise and thanks to God most high,
Mary, your Child is drawing me nigh.
Father, Son and Spirit blest,
O praise my soul will find rest!*

2. O sweet Madonna I entrust to your Son,
All that you see is within my heart.
You know so well all my pains and my fears,
Please bid them to depart.

Refrain

3. Now I'm at peace knowing you are near,
When strife and restlessness comes my way.
You send such hope and comfort to me,
Your peace fills my heart evermore.

Refrain

4. Dear Madonna La Leche please hold me close,
And nourish me with your heavenly food.
Your Son gave himself so that I can have life,
The life of His transforming bread.

Final Refrain

*This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.*

Lyrics written by Carol Zmuda

V. Let us pray.

Cherished Virgin, heaven's Queen, chosen before all women to be the mother of the Son of God, Mary, my mother, who in your maternity so sanctified the state of holy motherhood, imploringly I come to you; humbly I beseech you; confidently I trust in you. I know that, by your powerful intercession, you can help me in my need. In you I take refuge, dear Virgin. Poor and needy, I turn devoutly to you and place all my hopes confidently in your hands. Accept my humble trust, hear my petitions, and come to my aid, dear Mother of mothers. Amen.

V. Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Let it be done to me according to your Word.



History of Our Lady of La Leche

According to ancient tradition, the Milk Grotto, not far from Bethlehem, is the site where the Holy Family took refuge during the Slaughter of the Innocents before their flight to Egypt. While there, the Virgin Mary nursed the child Jesus. Some drops of milk sprinkled the walls, changing the color of the stone to white.

According to Franciscans who oversee the grotto and chapel, the grotto is at least 2,000 years old. Early Christians came to pray here, but the first structure was built around 385. Known in Arabic as “*Magharet el Saiyidee*” (*The Grotto of Our Lady*), the grotto, hollowed out of limestone, has become a place of pilgrimage for couples hoping to conceive a child.

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Day 2 – For a love for the Church and deeper devotion to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Scripture Reading (Acts 1:13a–14, 2:1–6): *When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, (and) ... devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.*

Reflection: Pope St. John Paul II said, *“In contemplating Mary’s powerful intercession as she waits for the Holy Spirit, Christians of every age have frequently had recourse to her intercession on the long and tiring journey to salvation, in order to receive the gifts of the Paraclete in greater abundance.”* Others present in the Upper Room were waiting in fearful expectation. The Blessed Virgin Mary, who by the mysterious intervention of the Spirit became the way by which the Savior came into the world, helped the community to dispel their fear and be well-disposed to the coming of the Paraclete (a Greek word meaning one who consoles or comforts, one who encourages or uplifts, one who refreshes, and who intercedes on our behalf as an advocate in court). Her unique experience made her ardently long for the Spirit’s coming and involved her in preparing the minds and hearts of those around her for the gift of the Spirit for herself and for the Church.

Prayer: Our Lady of La Leche, nurturing mother, at the moment of the incarnation the Holy Spirit descended upon you as one called to take part in the great mystery of our salvation. At the foot of the Cross, you were entrusted with a new motherhood, that of all Jesus’ beloved disciples. It was precisely this mission that demanded a renewed gift of the Spirit so that on the Feast of Pentecost the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon you was once again made known not only to you but also to all those who love your Son and entrust themselves to Him. Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of the Eucharist, instill in us a love for our Mother, the Church, which has you as its model. Instill in us the fervent desire to grow in holiness through the graces received from our worthy reception of the sacraments so that we may draw ever closer to your Divine Son. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Prayer of Consecration to Our Lady of La Leche

Most pure and holy virgin, mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we dedicate and consecrate ourselves to you this day and every day. The final action of your Divine Son as he gave his life on the Cross for our salvation was to give us you, most Holy Virgin, as our mother. Fully confident in this gift given by our Savior we now come before you seeking your loving care and maternal protection. We ask you to intercede for us to your Divine Son for our many needs, for He can refuse you nothing that is not in accord with His will.

Mary, Splendor of the Father and Full of Grace, you became pregnant with God through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforming Him into Sacred Humanity and delivering to us the supersubstantial Bread from Heaven, your most sweet milk that is the Eucharist. May this act of consecration draw us ever closer to your Son present to us in the Blessed Sacrament.

Nurturing Mother, pray for us, so that we may receive the grace to turn away from sin, to desire God alone, and deliver Christ to those we encounter in our lives. Give us also the strength to bear our crosses bravely, uniting our suffering with those of your Son for the sake of His body the Church.

Our Lady of La Leche, accept this sincere act of consecration and hear the prayers that we make in the name of your most holy Son, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...



Day 3 – For love of neighbor, especially the least in society.

Scripture Reading (Luke 1:39–45) *During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”*

Reflection: Jesus told his disciples the parable of the rich man who was blessed with a bountiful harvest (Luke 12:16–21). Rather than being generous with his excess he was concerned with devising new ways to hoard his wealth. In this sobering parable, we hear God say to the man, “*You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?*”

O how foolish we can be as well! We are blessed to live in a wealthy country. Most of us want for little and yet how often we are obsessed with gaining more and more. So often we fail to see that the more we fill our lives up with “things” the less room we have for God and others in our lives.

Though Jesus does not condemn material wealth outright he does give a sobering warning to “... *the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.*”

A person, a society, or a nation built only on material accumulation is often times a narcissistic one, one which could easily lead us to moral relativism as justification for being indifferent to the cries of the poor – a spiritual blindness besets us which often results in depression, loneliness, and greed. Our personal wealth is to be seen as a blessing, a gift from God, which for Christians means putting the needs of others before those of our own.

Prayer: In her series of spiritual conferences entitled *Greater Perfections*, Blessed Sister Miriam Teresa, Sister of Charity, offers this meditative prayer: “*The reason we have not yet become saints is because we have not understood what it means to love. We think we do, but we do not. To love means to annihilate oneself for the beloved. The self-sacrifice of a mother for her child is only a shadow of the love herewith we should love the Beloved of our soul. To love is to conform oneself to the Beloved in the most intimate manner of which we are capable; to have no views but His views, no thoughts but His thoughts, no desires but His desires, no likes but His likes, no wants but His wants, no hopes but His hopes, no will but His will. It is to have no joy but in suffering for Him, no glory but in being humiliated for Him, no life but in dying for Him, no death but in the living for Him. It is to have no consolation but in ministering to Him, no desolation but in grieving Him, no reward, but as the least of the least, in serving Him.*”

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

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Prayer: (Ephesians 3:14–19) *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Day 9 – In thanksgiving for blessings received.

Scripture Reading (Luke 2:4–14) *And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Reflection: How easy it is to come to prayer each day with a list of petitions for ourselves and others. Although asking our Lord to grant special favors is a part of prayer, He desires so much more from us. God knows that as we come in praise, worship and adoration of the Triune God and with thanksgiving for all the graces and blessings we have received, we begin to change. Our hearts and minds become less focused on ourselves. Our will, our desires, become His will, His desires. This is the transforming power of prayer! Instead of dwelling on all the things we don’t have and still think we need, we become grateful for what we do have and all we have been given. Father, help me to have a heart of gratitude for all the blessings you have bestowed on me each day. Help me to recognize the beauty of my life and the lives of those around me.

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Day 4 – Respect for life from conception to natural death.

Scripture Reading (Luke 1:26–38): *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

Reflection: Society today often sees a person, especially the least of those among us, as a burden. Children can be viewed as an inconvenience or a threat to a prosperous, self-centered lifestyle. The sick and elderly can easily be deemed worthless, no longer having a purpose in life. We however acknowledge that every person, from the first moment of conception to natural death, is of infinite worth. In the words of Terrance Cardinal Cooke, *"The 'gift of life,' God's special gift, is no less beautiful when it is accompanied by illness or weakness, hunger or poverty, mental or physical handicaps, loneliness or old age... It is in and through the weakest of human vessels that the Lord continues to reveal the power of his love."* Each person is of immeasurable value, not for who they might one day become or what they have done in the past, but for who they are at the present moment, a human being made in the image and likeness of God. Let us pray that all may come to see the beauty and dignity of every human person regardless of their state in life.

Let us pray that all people will boldly proclaim the value of all human life, especially an unborn child, for what they are; a cause for joy and a gift from God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, without you we can do nothing, but with you anything is possible. You are the Word that restores death to life. May we always be the messengers of Your word. May our will become one with Your will. Use our lives to proclaim your message of life, that through you, we may bring back to life those rejected or unwanted by society, especially the unborn. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Day 8 – For strong marriages and families.

Scripture Reading (John 2:1–11) *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.*

Reflection: Marriage – the mystery where one man and one woman become one – two in one flesh. So profound a mystery is the nuptial bond between husband and wife that St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians likens it to the relationship between Christ and His Church. Marriage forms the foundation of the family in every society, where the generous and responsible love of husband and wife is made visible through their self-giving love as parents who welcome and nurture children as a gift of God. The family – the embryonic Church where the Gospel is first proclaimed! It's no wonder that Pope St. John Paul II said, *"The future of the world and the Church passes through the family."* It is also no wonder that the devil is so intent on destroying the family. Destroy the family and we lose our God-given foundation, making it nearly impossible to welcome the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the self-giving, fruitful love that the Gospel calls for. Regarding this attack on the family Robert Cardinal Sarah recently said, *"Nowhere is this clearer than in the threat that societies are visiting on the family through a demonic 'gender ideology,' a deadly impulse that is being experienced in a world increasingly cut off from God"*

As Christians we must be ever vigilant of how God is being attacked in our lives, our homes, and our nation. We must not be afraid to proclaim the truth with love, especially about marriage according to God's plan, namely one man, one woman, for life, welcoming children as a gift from God and bringing them up in the Faith. Indeed, the battle to preserve these roots is perhaps the greatest challenge that our world has faced since its origins. Of course we respond to this challenge first and foremost through prayer and fasting. We recall the last words spoken by the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Gospel. At the wedding at Cana she simply told the servants *"Do whatever He tells you"* referring to her Divine Son. It's hard sometimes to understand what the Spirit is doing, where He is leading us, and what He is trying to teach us, yet we walk by faith and not by sight, trusting that the Spirit will guide us even through darkness.

By suffering and dying as we do, Jesus is Immanuel (literally, "God is with us"). No longer may we say that suffering and death are meaningless if the feet of God have passed that way, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned." (Heb. 4:15).

God has plumbed the depths of our existence so completely that nowhere can we go within ourselves and not find Him waiting for us. By the world's standards this is absurdity and foolishness, but the world's folly is God's wisdom.

That you are praying this novena and making this consecration says that you too wish to enter into this mystery. Dear Jesus take my hand on this journey and lead me to eternal life with you.

Prayer (Prayer of Abandonment of Blessed Charles de Foucauld):

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.
Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Antonio Cuipa and 81 Companions,
Martyrs of La Florida,
Native American Missionaries



Day 5 – For all those who minister God's love; clergy, religious, and laity.

Scripture Reading (Luke 2:25–35): *Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:*

"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Reflection: As we entrust our lives to Our Lady of La Leche, it is only fitting that we also honor her faithful husband, Joseph. Scripturally, we have precious little information about St. Joseph, but what little we have speaks volumes about this man who says nothing for himself.

Sacred Scripture simply tells us that, "*he was a righteous man.*" Righteousness means doing the revealed will of God. While Mary's perfect obedience to the will of God is reflected in her great yes, "*Let it be done to me according to thy word,*" Joseph's yes is spoken in silence, with the evangelist simply telling us that, "*Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...*" (Matthew 1:24).

Echoing the prayer of Pope St. John Paul II, "*May St. Joseph become for all of us an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ's saving mission, a mission which is the responsibility of each and every member of the Church.*"

Prayer: Most holy St. Joseph, never did your merits shine more brightly than when our Heavenly Father, speaking through the mouth of an angel said to you, "*Rise, take the child and his mother ...*" (Mt 2:13) Sinful Joseph, frail humanity, you were entrusted with the guardianship of the Incarnate Word and his sinless mother. We implore your intercession along with that of your beloved spouse so that we may increase in holiness in the sight of God and become worth instruments of the Gospel message.

St. Joseph, patron of husbands and fathers, pray for us!
St. Joseph, husband of Mary and head of the Holy Family, pray for us!
St. Joseph, protector of the Universal Church, pray for us!
Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Day 6 – For for all those who are persecuted for their faith and for religious liberty.

Scripture Reading (Matthew 2:13b–18) *The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”*

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.”

Reflection: There is a yearning in the hearts of us all for a moral and spiritual renewal. With a prophetic voice, Pope Paul VI wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi (On Evangelization in the Modern World)* that:

The world, paradoxically despite innumerable signs of denial of God, is nevertheless searching for him in unexpected ways, and painfully experiencing the need of him. The world is calling for evangelists to speak to it of a God who the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible.

Transforming our world involves nothing less than a transformation of our culture, beginning with ourselves. In our society, the freedom of choice, which in and of itself is a good thing, has been distorted and has elevated to the status of an idol – a false god – a god that will destroy us if we let it. If such attitudes are to be transformed, then minds and hearts must undergo profound changes.

But before we can begin to build such a community we must first foster a deep personal spiritual life ourselves – to know “... a God who the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible.” To accomplish this our lives must be rooted in prayer, nourished by the Word of God, sustained by His sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, and with consciences formed in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

Prayer: Dearest Lord, today, even many Catholics promote the view that conscience has merely to do with acting as one sees fit. Individuals are thought to be free to pick and choose the precepts and commandments they observe, as if morality were entirely a matter of choice and opinion. Give us the grace Lord, even in difficult circumstances and in spite of it being unfashionable to do so, to boldly yet gently defend the truths of your Church and serve as an example to all those we encounter.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

Day 7 – For the Church Suffering.

Scripture Reading (John 19:25–27): *Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.*

Reflection: Basil Cardinal Hume tells the story of a man who, shortly after the Second World War, came to him seeking guidance. His wife had died, his business was near collapse, and his body was in pain from sickness. With it all he was anxious and depressed. He could not understand why it had to be like this. The man prayed, "I want my pain removed, my broken heart mended, my anguish taken away," but there was no answer. It was as though he were looking into a dark bottomless pit of misery. The good Cardinal told him this story about an isolated event, supposedly true, that took place at one of the Nazi death camps.

People, mostly Jews, were lined up ready to go into the gas chambers. There were men, women, and children too. A child cried – a gypsy girl, as she hung on to her doll, all she had left in this world. One of the guards looked on, idly, uninvolved, shouting orders. Then he looked at them going two by two into the gas chamber. A soldier tried to snatch the doll from the crying child, but she hung on.

In that moment, the guard who was watching changed. The hardness of his heart softened; he felt shame. "What am I doing?" he asked. "What have these people done to be treated like this? It should not be."

What could he do? Rush to save them? Fight off the other guards? No, he would join those walking into the gas chamber. He would become one of them, share their fate. To the astonishment of the other soldiers he flung his rifle to the ground, stripped off his uniform, and joined those walking to their death.

He walked with the girl, who held his hand, her other hand hanging on to the doll. The child smiled serenely, somehow at peace. They walked on, side by side, giving strength to each other. Together they had triumphed over death and over evil, and found the paradox of death that leads to life.

God could have removed all our pain, but chose not to do so. He chose another way. He emptied himself and joined us in our pain and bewilderment. He would walk with us, hand in hand, travel the same road, and endure the same trials. Why he chose this way, we do not know. God's ways are not our ways. Like the guard, God's love for humanity was so intense that he emptied himself to become as we are so that we might become as He is.

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