

ST. MARY'S CHURCH

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*Father, You revealed Your Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star. Lead us to
Your Glory in Heaven by the Light of Faith.*

LOVING GOD BACK



In looking back at my most recent bulletin reflections on Advent, Christmas and the incredible real-time stories of Christ's coming to earth in the unfolding of His salvific will to save

us, I realize and am actually overwhelmed by how much God has loved and does love us. Yet my thoughts have often returned to a personal question I ask of myself which is – do I really love God?

Someone who knows me, knows that I am a priest and that I preside at Holy Mass in the proclamation of the Word, preaching, and in the Eucharistic Prayer, may assume that I love God, otherwise, why would I be living this kind of priestly life? Yet the question still remains in my head because if God is so totally 'other' than anything I can attempt to say about God, then how would it even be possible for me to love that which I cannot see, have never seen nor can I even touch? Fulton Sheen once said that Jesus became incarnate because He knew that we could never love anyone or anything we couldn't get our arms around. While that may be true and truly shows how God is so intimate with me, He remains One whom I cannot see. And yet, I 'see' Him and have seen Him.

The Feast of the Epiphany (manifestation) affords me an opportunity to ponder God's love for me and my love for God. I know that these two loves (God's and my own) are not like comparing apples to apples, nor even apples to oranges. God's love is *off the charts*, so to speak and makes my efforts and expressions of love toward Him to be as vapour. Since God loves me and its proof is found within myself and my experience of Him, my love for God, it should follow, is found within myself as well since that love would exist within me and go out from me toward God, yet, I am not certain of the dimensions of that love at all. I can say for sure that I have experienced God's love many times in ways that were actually felt in my physical body. My grade-one experience of the Holy Spirit, when I had told the class and my teacher that "I would like to be a priest", was one of physical witness to the presence of the Lord when I felt my heart suddenly racing along with a strange sense within as if I were being filled with cotton candy. Looking back to this illumination when I was only six years old and could perceive and in fact "know" God's loving presence and confirmation of a call placed within me, most likely since my baptism or even beyond, I am still astonished. My experiences of God's love led me to be filled with gratitude and that gratitude leads me to respond to the love of God by loving Him back, yet in no proportion to anything like that of God's love for me.

I think of the story of Mother Teresa who was once asked by a dying man she was caring for, whether God was like her. "No", she replied, "but we try to be like Him". And the man said, "Then

I want to be like Him too." The imitation of one who loves and serves God is a powerful sign that can inspire another to love God because of the fruits of that kind of love that is given us by God in those who love Him.

So, back to my question of my love for God. Since I am a man; sinful, fallen and falling so short of the goodness and glory of God, any love that I am capable of is imperfect, flawed, and even inconsistent and as nothing to God. How can this kind of love even be worth anything let alone reach out to God. But it does.

But what is the measure of my love for the God I cannot see or what is its motivation? In 1 John 4:10 it says: "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." God is the initiator of love in us and enables us to experience and know His love. But would I still love God if God were not beneficent, benevolent, merciful and loving? Or am I only returning feigned love to God for all of His attributes and blessings as if in appeasement. Our God is not one to be appeased but praised, not to be paid lip service but worshipped, not to be approached as just another thing or being amongst everything else, but to be known for He, by His will and design, has made Himself known. He has no need of my love for as God He has no need. So, then, in order to love Christ, it seems dependent on my having a personal relationship with Him which is only possible because He has willed it and made it known to us, to me.

The God I dare say that 'I know' is only known by me because He has allowed it. And this same God of all, has lowered the veil of His pure mystery in sending His Son, Jesus, God-in-the-flesh to the earth and to me that we might know Him and see Him and love Him back. This is why I know that gratitude to God is so essential in my relationship with Him. St. Bernard of Clairvaux said that "ingratitude is the soul's enemy; it empties it of merit, scatters its virtues, and deprives it of grace." Conversely, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian, (d. 1945), wrote that "*In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich. It is very easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements in comparison with what we owe others*". And I would add, and what is that which we owe to others in comparison to God who has made them? While I write here these thoughts I do so with a keen awareness that in the face of the presence of this unbelievable God of love and that love for me Who chooses to overlook my unworthiness and ugliness, I should shut my mouth and never speak again for it is so unspeakably not deserved. And yet... God loves me and my heart and soul's response to this truth and mystery I know is the cause of my gratitude as a lived response.

"Theological insights are gained not only from between two covers of a book, but from two bent knees before an altar. The Holy Hour becomes like an oxygen tank to revive the breath of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the foul and fetid atmosphere of the world." (F. J. Sheen) It is gratitude kneeling. (Fr. Charles)



MASS
SCHEDULE & INTENTIONS

Tues Jan 7 th	
7:00pm	✚ Marie & Denis Fonseca Requested by Rupika & Family
Wed Jan 8 th	
8:30am	✚ Mato Krajinovic Requested by wife Katherine & Family
Thurs Jan 9 th	
8:30am	✚ Marianne Amadeo Requested by the Rosary Apostolate
Fri Jan 10 th	
8:30am	✚ Emilia & Ted Requested by Eva
Sat Jan 11 th	
3:30 to 4:00pm	Confession
4:30pm	✚ Dorothy Dynes Requested by Antonietta & Domenic Sanfilippo
Sun Jan 12 th	
9:00am	✚ Deceased Members of the Mannion Family Requested by Rosemary Holzendorff
11:00am	For the People

Please Pray for the Sick

Jean Ferguson, Fred Coulson, Hilary Joseph, Henry Niepalla, Albert Sant, Teresa & Feliks Kosierb, Elizabeth Pavilsa, Ashley Zavitz, Alex Poirier & Family, Tammy MacDonald, Anita Taglione, Mary Little, Yvonne Grimm, Janine Wright, Anne Johnston.

Please Pray for the Recently Deceased



The Sanctuary Lamp Burns
In memory of the Krajinovic
& Rozic Families
Jan 5th to Jan 11th 2025



**ARE YOUR REGISTERED WITH THE PARISH?
HAVE YOU MOVED?**

DO WE HAVE YOUR CORRECT ADDRESS

Please let the office know, as we want to make sure that your tax receipt get to you

OFFERTORY ENVELOPES

Please don't forget to pick up your 2025 Offertory Envelopes. They will be out on the shelf in-between the church and the hall. **Anyone who would like to start using envelopes, please call the office and I will get a box ready.**

PAG – PREAUTHORIZED GIVING

The Archdiocese of Toronto has established a Pre-Authorized Giving Plan (PAG) to assist you in your support of the work of the Parish through your regular parish offerings. To accomplish the mission entrusted to us by Christ, the parishes depend entirely on the generosity of their parishioners. Pre-authorized giving allows you to give to your parish through scheduled monthly transfers from your bank account or credit card. These funds are then deposited directly to the parish account. There are various benefits of participating in pre-authorized giving, both for you and for your parish. Advantages for you:

- The convenience of having your offering automatically contributed to the parish.
- Knowing you continue to support the parish even when you are away
- Regular, dependable contributions to the parish.
- Reduction of cash on hand.
- Reduction of paperwork. For information on how to enroll, please contact your parish office.

TIP TAP PAY

The future of giving is coming to St. Mary's Parish. In the New Year, we will be installing a Tip Tap pay machine in the front vestibule of the parish. There will be a device that will allow you to tap \$5.00, \$10.00 or \$20.00.

You will also have the option to register your card after your first TAP, if you wish to receive a tax receipt, (you only need to register your card one time).

Each 'tip tap' gift that you make with a registered card will be available for an end of year tax receipt. There is no data stored in the 'tip tap' device; it also cannot be hacked as any tampering triggers a signal that shuts down the device.

More information to follow.

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