

THE MUSTARD SEED

A NEWSLETTER FROM ST. THOMAS AQUINAS PARISH

January 2023

Letter From Our Pastor

As I think about the blessings that God has given us and the many beautiful things in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I realize that along the way we are asked to make certain contributions in return, for example contributions of time, money, or other resources. All of them are valuable and necessary, but they do not constitute our total offering to God. In the end, what our Heavenly Father will require of us is more than a contribution; it is a total commitment, a complete dedication, everything we are and everything we can become.

Please understand that I am not just referring to a commitment to the Church and its activities, although these always need to be strengthened. No, I am talking more specifically about a commitment that



is demonstrated by our individual behavior; with our personal integrity; with our allegiance to home, family, and community, as well as to the Church.

Last October we started a new path with the reorganization of our Parish Council, which thanks to the will of a group of experienced parishioners, we have given ourselves the task of involving more people who are committed to this work.

In this brief reflection, I want to introduce and expand the meaning of our Parish Survey, how we might prepare for it, and emphasize that all of us participate in it. This is a very important event for the whole parish, both communities. The Parish Survey is more than a meeting, more than trying to solve an issue. It is a spiritual event intended to reinvigorate our parish and to hear and learn what you think.

We have the opportunity to be heard and to listen to our neighbor. Now to listen like this we need humility and faith; we will have to put aside our egoism and selflessness.

May God, Protector and Giver of Life, protect us and free us from diseases and dangers in this year that we are beginning.

Yours in Christ Jesus,
Father Rogelio Felix-Rosas



An Artist Transformed

by Barbara Lee

When Utah State University Professor of Sculpture Eileen Doktorski, a member of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Logan, kissed her husband good-bye one day four years ago, she had no idea he was leaving her and her then-two-year-old daughter. "I can understand how he could leave me," Doktorski said in a July 13 interview with the Intermountain Catholic. "But how could he leave his beautiful daughter without even saying good-bye?"

"I was on a painful journey I neither sought nor wanted."

Totally unprepared for divorce and single parenthood, Doktorski began gathering all the strength and resources she had. This strong, gifted woman, who'd earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, N.Y., a Master's Degree in Fine Arts from the Yale School of Art in New Haven, Conn., and was a Fulbright Scholar at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Poland, found herself dispirited and depressed. She struggled to get out of bed each morning, and every day brought more change, more challenge, and more heartache. "I was on a painful journey I neither sought nor wanted," she said.

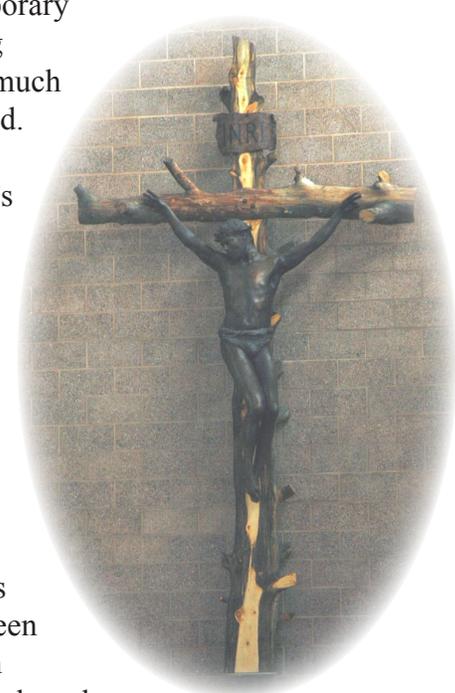
Doktorski, who was raised in a Catholic family and is committed to raising her daughter, Paisley, a Catholic, was still deeply wounded when she approached St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Pastor Father Clarence Sandoval in spring, 2005, about the parish's need for a crucifix for the new church and his vision for the crucifix. "I had never sculpted religious art before beyond restoring a Madonna once," Doktorski said. "I'd hear Fr. Clarence was looking for a crucifix with a life-size corpus that would really show the suffering and torment Jesus endured, and that he wanted original art for the new church. The parish has been so kind to me in the past three years

Note: Many newcomers to our parish may not know the story about our beautiful and unique crucifix which serves as the focal point of our chapel. The article below was first printed in the Intermountain Catholic on July 28, 2006. The sculptor, Dr. Eileen Doktorski moved from Logan several years ago and is now an associate professor at Mt. San Jacinto College in southern California. This story is one that will stay with you.....

that I wanted to give something of my talent, my gift, back, so, with Fr. Clarence's counsel and advice, I started the journey.

"I saw in the cross someone else's suffering, and it took me out of my own," she said. "It gave me a place where I could cry, and it deepened both my spirituality and my feeling of interconnectedness with others and with the world." Doktorski's style of sculpture is life casting, and she's specialized in the subjects of grief, violence, and emotional conflict. She began delving again into everything she knew about art history. She studied crucifixion and its effects on the human body, and she spent hours meditating before the crucifix in St. Jerome Chapel, the site of the old St. Thomas Aquinas Church. "It seems contemporary artists aren't doing religious art very much any more," she said. "A lot of art is related to it, but it's a step outside.

"I knew I needed God, and I know the crucifix is the focal point of every Catholic church. It's one of the most compelling images in all of art. I've seen many crucifixes in churches here and abroad. But this was the first time I was able to identify with the torture Jesus endured, the isolation he underwent; the openness and



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An Artist Transformed

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acceptance with which he approached his passion without knowing what was coming next.”

Out of her contemplation on the crucifix in the St. Jerome Chapel came Doktorski's desire to maintain the tension of life in the corpus on the new cross. The sculptor began doing preliminary work – seeking models to pose for the corpus, selecting the perfect medium from which the corpus would be cast (she settled on alginate, the material used by dentists to make tooth molds), which she would then cover with plaster, then cast in bronze. She made sketches of models in various poses and submitted them to the parish committee overseeing the crucifix project and Fr. Sandoval.

“It wasn't always easy to ask a person if they would pose for Christ,” she said, “especially if the crucifix and the crucifixion were outside their personal faith tradition. I ended up using three models. I was blessed to have been able to get a Jewish man I know to model for the face and head of Jesus. That was important. Another man modeled for the torso and legs of Jesus, and another for the hands.”

Doktorski said she wanted the crucifix to move people and to relate, especially, the words of Christ: “Father, why have you forsaken me?” Continuing, she said, “Clearly, in this crucifix, Jesus is man, and at this moment, he is abandoned,” she said. “In my prayers before the crucifix, I determined that I wanted people to delve back into their own personal suffering and relate to Jesus.”

Another result of her contemplation was her resolve to use a tree from the Cache National Forest for the wood of the cross. That aspect of the project expanded the number of the people working on the crucifix ten-fold, and forced Doktorski to do something that made her uncomfortable clear to her core; ask for help. “I was changing,” she said. Until this time on the massive project, Doktorski had relied on the help of only Adam Bradshaw, her graduate student assistant. But now, they had to find, acquire permission to cut, and transport the perfect tree from which to make the cross, and it would prove to be a huge undertaking. It took Doktorski, Bradshaw, eight members of the parish, six members of the Newman Club, and four



Cache Valley and Utah State University Sculptor Eileen Doktorski stands in the new St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Church in Hyde Park. The crucifix, which Doktorski created, marks a journey of faith which was assisted, she said, by Pastor Father Clarence Sandoval, the Parish MOMS group, and parish and Newman Club members who supported her. Her students and graduate student Adam Bradshaw, project assistant, added their efforts to the massive project.

of Doktorski's students to accomplish the task. The images of a parish carrying its heavy cross through several feet of snow, and strangers stepping in to help carry the cross was not lost on the artist.

Logan woodworker George Hessenthaler of Urban Forest Woodworks joined the project fully when the truck with the tree pulled up in front of his shop to be cut. “He invited me to use his shop to put the pieces of the crucifix together, because it offered much more working space than my studio,” Doktorski said. “It was a real gift, and he was a tremendous help. In the end, if one single person had been missing, wouldn't have happened.”

In retrospect, Doktorski said, she has a great deal to be thankful for. The crucifix project not only created a beautiful work of liturgical art, it was an experience of growth and self-discovery for her. “I feel there is much suffering and conflict in the world and art can have a part in lifting people up when they are recovering from loss,” she said. “Recognizing that everyone, regardless of religious faith, experiences a range of feelings from joy to pain, helped me create a sculpture that would move all open to viewing it. I envisioned a Christ figure evoking strong emotion and inspiring in worshipers a great compassion for others.

“I experience great joy in life, but do not feel the need for spiritual comfort during such times. It is when I recall moments of loss and struggle that I look most to God and to art to take me outside my own pain. I feel a greater interconnection to all of humanity and the universe when I am moved and inspired by great works of art. I feel my own spirituality and understanding of God is best expressed through my art.”



Spotlight on the Buyserie Family

by Linda Bradak

Think about how edified you feel when you meet people who embody enthusiasm, curiosity and a positive nature. Though it was an evening interview with Beth, Benjamin and Samuel Buyserie, I left their home feeling more refreshed than before arriving.

I learned that the last name “Buyserie” is Flemish and that the three Buyseries moved to Logan in July 2019 from Pullman, Washington, after Beth earned her Ph.D. She accepted a position in the English Department at USU, where she is Director of Composition. She not only teaches writing to undergraduate students but also to graduate students who, in turn, work with undergrads. When I queried her on how well students write today, I found her unexpectedly affirming: “Students now write for different audiences. Electronic media have afforded new venues for writing, and I find in general that students are stepping up to the plate.”

Naturally, the three Buyseries are all avid readers. Samuel, 10, is a fifth grader at Hillcrest Elementary. Unusually articulate for a 10-year old, Sam loves graphic novels and comics as well as playing his violin. He insisted upon reading the back-cover blurb of his current favorite book to me —

“The One and Only Ivan” — replete with different voices. Sam is in the dual Spanish-English immersion program at school.

Benjamin Buyserie is 13 and in 8th grade at Mt. Logan Middle School. He loves the cello, which he has been studying for 5 years now, as well as playing baseball. The entire family enjoys hiking together in our



Samuel, Beth, and Benjamin Buyserie

beautiful mountains nearby. Both boys will go to Logan High School eventually. Benjamin, like his mother, serves as a lector at St. Thomas, and both boys – already confirmed – help with the First Communion class. They also assisted at Vacation Bible School and participate with their mom in our Luke 240 group. Indeed, this is a Catholic family, practicing their faith. “It’s important to us to do some service,” Beth says. She served on her former church’s parish council and attended many faith-developing retreats. She’d like our parish to offer retreats also.

On the wall of the house is a plaque reading “Pray, Wait, Trust.” Beth described its meaning thusly: “‘Pray’ reminds me to stay close to God. ‘Wait’ means that we may need to see what evolves, requiring time to become clear. ‘Trust’ takes me back to a retreat I did at St. Gertrude’s Monastery in northern Idaho. It was as though I heard God asking me, ‘Do you trust me?’ Its personal tone led me, leads me to pray more deeply.”

Beth Buyserie and her sons all express an interest in social justice and in the environment. “During the pandemic, when we home-schooled, the boys read about a variety of people and did a project on the history of black Catholics. We love Jesus’ words about helping create greater equity in the world: “Go and do likewise.”

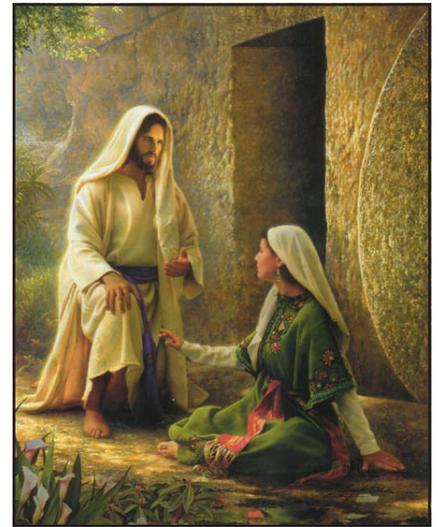
Beth closed our interview by reporting that the very first person she met at St. Thomas was Mary Veronica Kolesar. Mary V. always said that she “saw God in the faces of *people*.” Likewise, Beth embodies the Christian truth, “Love one another.” Both of us saw Christ in Mary V., and I see Him in the Buyserie family as well.





Through the 16 years of my experience as a Catholic, I have often turned to Mary as a model of love, faith, and devotion. When I have grieved, I have pondered her unimaginable sadness as she watched her Son die upon the cross. Mary knew the depths of love and of loss, and her faith remained untarnished. I can “offer up” my own sorrows, knowing they are intimately understood and felt, and that God will be with me, that I need not bear alone that which cannot be borne alone. God is with us, as He was with Mary. It seems the more I can emulate her, the more I can know and feel His presence with me.

Another gift for me upon becoming Catholic was finding the example of Mary’s friend, St. Mary Magdalene. Although it is being re-evaluated in religious circles, Mary Magdalene is portrayed, like me, as having a “checkered past.” It is probably no accident – rather an example of divine humor – that my faith took root at a parish called St. Mary Magdalene. My heart sings that it was none other than Mary Magdalene who ran to Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning and found it empty... that He is risen!



God is for me the ultimate and divine Alchemist, who can turn sin into goodness and faith. We are surrounded by more invisible love and presence than we can know. We cannot perceive radio waves or even the high-pitched sounds of a dog whistle, but we know these vibrations permeate us. Similarly, the exquisite level of support and love which God offers us may appear subtle. If we conclude that our flaws are so great as to exclude us from His presence, we are missing the point. We can always “tune in” as did Mary Magdalene. We are blessed to be able to befriend her and also Jesus’ mom, Mary.

Open your hearts and your minds to their reality and to the ineffable gifts of your faith which they can bring. Like me, you will be the richer for it.

An Unexpected Gift or Two

by Linda Bradak

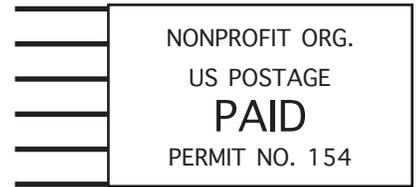
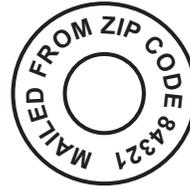
I grew up in a Lutheran family and joined the Catholic Church at age 61, having completed the Rite of Christian Initiation in Adulthood (RCIA) program at St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church in Millville, New Jersey.

As one raised Lutheran, of course I was aware that Mary was Jesus’ mom, and I honored her for that. However, it was not until I became a Catholic that I came to know and to connect with Mary’s real significance. I remember Fr. Paul Olszewski, Pastor of St. Mary Mag’s at the time, speaking of her importance and also her accessibility to us, the faithful. He suggested we can always turn to Mary, the Mother of God. And just as any good mother has a special “in” with her beloved child, Mary will gladly intercede with her Son on our behalf.

Who wouldn’t like that extra help? I sure want it.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**PARISH SURVEY COMING SOON...
WE NEED YOUR**



FEEDBACK

As Father Rogelio mentioned on the front page, registered parishioners will have the opportunity to share their hopes and ideas about our parish in the next few weeks.

Parishioners will receive the survey by email and there will also be a QR Code in the bulletin, on posters in the Gathering Space and near the Parish Office.

If you have any questions, please contact Adrienne Akers at adrienne.akers@gmail.com



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