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CUSAN

SUMMER / FALL, 2024



CUSA

An Apostolate of Persons with
Chronic Illness and/or Disability

What Is CUSA?

CUSA is an active apostolate which unites its members in the Cross of Christ so that they "FIND GOD'S WILL OR PURPOSE IN THEIR SUFFERING." Physical or mental illness, or disability or chronic pain is the sole requirement for membership.

CUSANS are united through email group-letters which regularly bring news of the other members of the group, and a message from the group's Spiritual Advisor.

By uniting in CUSA and collectively offering their crosses of suffering to Christ for the benefit of mankind, CUSANS help themselves and each other, spiritually and fraternally.

Members able to do so are asked to make an annual contribution of **\$20.00**. Those unable to assist CUSA financially are still welcome and invited to join CUSA.

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The CUSAN

Summer / Fall, 2024

In This Issue	2
A Letter to CUSANS	3
Fr. Jerry Bracken, C.P.	
From the Spiritual Apothecary of Friar Lawrence	10
Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.	
Advent Retreat Online	14
God Chooses the Weak	16
Shirley Bowling	
First CUSAN Ordained a Priest: Also a Future Canonized Saint?	20
My God Story	22
Marian June Rose	
Looking Back: A Joyful Visit	27
Eucharist: The Gift Supreme	28
Fr. Richard J. Hopkins	
God Bless America	30
Anna Marie Sopko	
A CUSAN's Magnificat	32
Betty O'Brien	
Diary of Jerry Filan	33

In This Issue

Thanks to our writers, the articles in this issue reveal how powerful the Lord is in the transformation of those He loves through the gift of the Cross—His Cross as well as ours. The last thing we would choose to experience in our lives is suffering. But when welcomed, with His grace and help and Sacraments, how powerful it is, making sinners into saints!

One saint you will read about here is Edith Stein—St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Father Jerry’s article about her reaches deep into the soul. Next Father Lawrence will guide us along our own path to sanctity: choosing God above all else, and acting upon this faith in all we do. Shirley Bowling shows through Scripture that those who are weak can have great hope that God is ready to do great things through them. Father Charles Kram is living proof of this. Read also about happy moments CUSANs Marian June Rose and Sister Maureen Floyd have had in the past. And Anna Marie Sopko encourages us all to pray now for America.

There is more to say, but no room here except to mention an opportunity on December 12 for you to make an online retreat sponsored by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) and given via Zoom by Maureen Pratt. See page 14 for details. And if we get enough articles from you, our next issue hopefully will be for Christmas!

God bless you!



Dolores Steinberg, editor

A LETTER
TO
CUSANS



Rev. Jerry Bracken, C.P.
CUSA National Chaplain



Dear CUSANS,

I am writing the following about St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, for I think she represents you in what you are doing as a CUSAN—offering your disabilities and prayer for the apostolic work of the Church.

For August 9, I was the Community Mass’s principal celebrant, commemorating St. Teresa Benedicta. It was recommended that the readings be selected from those for the votive Mass of the Sacred Heart. Two of them seemed to be about two realities of Edith Stein’s life, her early life as a Jew and her later life as a Catholic.

Capturing Teresa Benedicta’s early life is the reading from John 10. In it, Jesus says, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

In her early life, Edith (Teresa Benedicta) was not in Jesus’ fold. She was a Jew, the eleventh child of the

German couple, Herr and Frau Stein. Devout German Jews, the Day of Atonement and Passover were the high points of their religious life.

Edith was an affectionate child, who at two years of age called her father back for a final goodbye before he went to his lumber business. Unfortunately, this was his last goodbye as that day he had a stroke and died. As a result Frau Stein was left all alone to run their lumber business and to raise their seven remaining children.

Edith was also strong willed and precocious. She was known to throw a temper tantrum when things did not go her way and she would make clever remarks during the conversations of adults. Her relative described her as “vain” and “smart.” This hurt, she wrote, because “I thought they were saying that I needed to exaggerate my own intelligence, but even as a little girl, I knew it was much more important to be good than to be smart.” So school became the only place where Edith could express herself well and be taken seriously. There, Edith used her intelligence to help her fellow students.

Surprisingly, while Edith was edified by her mother’s great devotion, by the time Edith was 13, she was unable to believe in a personal God. So she decided not to pray. Thus, she became one of the lost sheep of the Sinai Covenant. In her favor were Edith’s own words, “My quest for truth was my only prayer.”

Having done very well in her secondary education, Edith entered the University of Breslau to study psychology. Disappointed with its approach and having

read *Logical Investigations* by the renowned phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, Edith resolved to go to Göttingen to study under him. There she was also influenced by Max Scheler, who directed her attention to Roman Catholicism, and also by Husserl's colleague, Adolf Reinach and his wife, who converted to Lutheranism during WWI.

During WWI Edith worked at an Austrian field hospital caring for the sick and dying. Then in 1917, at Husserl's request, Edith became his teaching assistant at the University of Freiburg. There she wrote her dissertation on "The Problem of Empathy," and attained her doctoral degree, *summa cum laude*.

Her further openness to believing in God came when she visited the wife of Adolf Reinach who had been killed in battle. Moved by Frau Reinach's hope in the midst of her grief, Edith wrote, "This was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power it imparted to those who bear it."

Then in the summer of 1921 Edith's constant search for truth was connected with belief in Christ. When her friends, the Conrad-Martius's, were out, Edith selected one of their books, the autobiography of Teresa of Avila. Not able to put it down, she read it the whole night through. On finishing it, she said to herself, "This is the truth." Consequently, on January 1, 1922, at the age of 31, Edith was baptized and took the name Teresa. In doing so, she now became one of Jesus's own flock.

Thinking that she must have her mind fixed on only divine things, Edith gave up her scholarly career. Her livelihood, from 1922 to 1931, was teaching German

and history at the Dominican sisters' school and teacher training college in Speyer, being a lay person, but living as a religious. Only when her Jesuit priest friend, Fr. Erich Przywara, suggested she translate and publish some things from Newman and Thomas Aquinas did Edith discern she should resume her scholarly work. She did this through publications and lecture tours. One theme was the role of women. As their vocation is the protection of life and the preservation of the family, women cannot remain indifferent as to whether or not governments and nations assume forms which are favorable to the growth of the family and the well-being of the young.

The reading capturing Teresa Benedicta's later life comes from the Book of Exodus (34:8–9). Having received the 10 Commandments of the Sinai Covenant, "Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship; then he said, "If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company." This was Edith's attitude regarding her own Jewish people.

The first event that sparked this attitude was in 1931 when her application as a university professor was turned down by two universities. Not only was it because she was a woman but also because of antisemitism. Then, in 1932, when Edith accepted a lectureship at the University of Munster, she was horrified when its students violently attacked Jews. Next came Hitler's April 1933 Aryan's Civil Service Law—the first legal formulation used to exclude Jews from organizations, professions, and other aspects of public life. From these experiences and while making a

Holy Hour at the Carmelite convent in Cologne, Edith in her prayer spoke to Christ, saying that she “realized it was his Cross that was now being laid upon the Jewish people, that the few who understood this had the responsibility of carrying it in the name of all, and that . . . [she herself] was willing to do this, if he would only show . . . [her] how:” When Edith returned to Munster she was told she would have to give up her lectureship position.

The next events brought joy and sorrow. Because Hitler’s law shut the door to Edith having a professional influence on others, her spiritual advisors gave approval of her long standing desire to be a Carmelite Nun. Edith’s sorrow came with the telling of her decision to her family and especially her mother, whom she greatly loved. On Edith’s birthday, the conversation began with eighty-four year old Frau Stein saying to her forty-two year old beloved daughter, “Why did you get to know it [Christianity]? I don’t want to say anything against him. He may have been a very good person. But why did he make himself God?” Having said this, Edith’s mother buried her face in her hands and cried. Both of their hearts were broken.

A week or so later, in Cologne, Edith was vested as a Carmelite nun, taking the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. “Teresa” for Teresa of Avila, “Benedicta” regarding liturgical worship, and “Cross” regarding her intercessory role for people. In 1938, Edith spoke of what this meant to her in 1933. “I understood the cross as the destiny of God’s people . . . I felt that those who understood the Cross of Christ

should take it upon themselves on everybody's behalf. Of course, I know better now what it means to be wedded to the Lord in the sign of the cross. However, one can never comprehend it, because it is a mystery." To capture what she believed, Edith wrote, "I keep thinking of Queen Esther who was taken away from her people precisely because God wanted her to plead with the king on behalf of her nation. I am a very poor powerless little Esther, but the King who has chosen me is infinitely great and merciful." This was written October 31, 1938. November 9, 1938 was *Kristallnacht*, the euphemistic name which comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues were smashed.

So on New Year's Eve, Edith was smuggled out of Germany to the Netherlands and to the Carmelite Convent in Echt. On June 9, 1939, Edith wrote, "Even now I accept the death that God has prepared for me in complete submission and with joy as being his most holy will for me. I ask the Lord to accept my life and my death . . . so that the Lord will be accepted by His people and that His Kingdom may come in glory, for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world."

On August 2, 1942, Edith Stein was arrested by the Gestapo, while she was in the chapel with the other sisters. Her last words to be heard in Echt were addressed to her own sister, Rosa: "Come, we are going for our people." In so acting, Edith turned the intercessory prayer of her Carmelite life on behalf of people into the final sacrifice of the Cross, that is, her

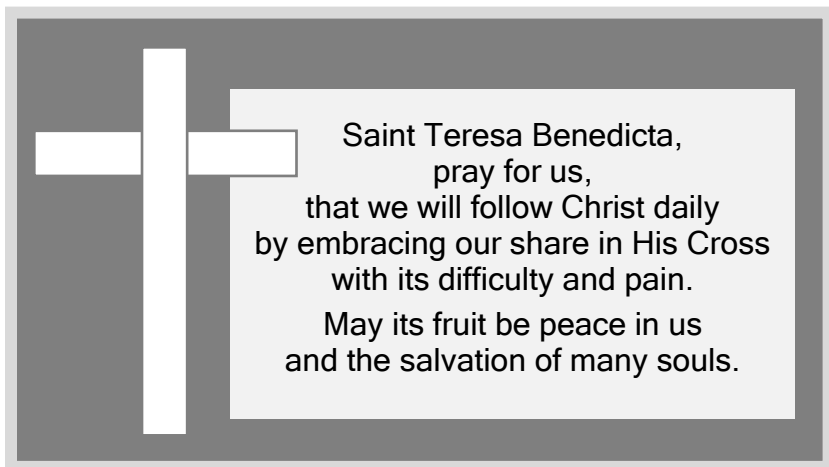
death in union with Jesus. She believed that His ultimate sacrifice and her share in it will atone for evil, making sinners and saints at one with each other and at one with God, to rise bodily into eternal life.

You, who are CUSANs, like Edith Stein, have made the cross of your disabilities into intercessory prayers for others. May your belief in its worth enable you to continue to do so.

Sincerely,



Edith with Rosa and their fellow Jews were murdered in a gas chamber at Birkenau, August 9, 1942.





From the Spiritual Apothecary of Friar Lawrence

Father Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.
CUSA Administrator from 2007
through 2021

Ever since we awakened this morning, we have all had to make several choices since we have gotten out of bed. There is nothing strange about this because every day of our lives is a day in which we make certain choices. Life is full of choices. Some of those choices are simply the incidental episodes of our life. However, the Scriptures speak of another kind of choice—a choice which both Joshua and Jesus ask their respective followers.

The Book of Joshua presents a narrative of the way Israel took possession of the land of Canaan, making it the land of Israel. This process was swift and impossible to stop. The process was followed by an orderly division and disposition of the land among the 12 tribes of Israel. The final chapter of the Book of Joshua tells us of a ceremony of covenant renewal. Joshua stands before the people and asks whether they will obey or disobey the first of the 10 Commandments. He says, “Decide today whom you will serve”: this God or other gods. Canaan was filled with people who worshiped idols and false gods. Joshua tells the Israelites that they must make a choice. Either they will

worship the Lord, or they will join the other inhabitants of this land in worshipping their idols.

This is the single most momentous, most important, most fundamental choice that every single human being who ever lived had or has to make. It is the choice that has total consequences both in this life and in the next life, the choice that changes the ultimate point of everything in this life and the one that decides where we will live out eternal life. Either we obey and worship God, or we choose to follow the idols of our 21st century. Every one of us is wooed by the idols of wealth, success, fame, or one of the many other temptations that are part of every human being's life.

Chapter 6 of the Gospel of St. John contains the Discourse on the Bread of Life. Throughout this discourse, Christ reveals to us a great and beautiful mystery; namely, His Eucharistic love for us. Here are Christ's words: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." Jesus literally gave up his life for love of us and gave us the Eucharist as a way to remember that gift of love. Following this declaration, we hear the disciples' answer: "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" The Gospel text goes on to tell us that as a result of this statement by Jesus, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer followed Jesus.

At the beginning of chapter six of St. John's Gospel, Jesus fed the multitude that had gathered to hear him preach. About 5,000 people, not counting the women and children, were fed miraculously with five loaves of

barley bread and two fish. As we come to the end of this chapter, that multitude has dwindled to just the twelve apostles. Jesus turns to them and asks: “Do you also want to leave?” One can almost hear the disappointment in his voice. He had been sent by his Father to save the world, but the world decides that it is too difficult to put their faith in this carpenter from Nazareth. As he so often does in these situations, Peter is the first to speak. “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” Through these words, Peter makes his choice.

Jesus asks the same question of each one of us today. Do we put our faith in Jesus? Faith is first of all a gift of grace that comes from God’s free will even before it is a choice that comes from our free will. God’s grace always comes first, but it does not bypass our free will. We are responsible for the free choice to believe. God gives each of us the free choice to believe him or to leave him, to be faithful to him or unfaithful to him. Faith is not a mere idea, a mere opinion. Faith is the trust that says “yes” to God’s proposal. Saying yes to this offer changes our whole life. Faith is not just a belief but a choice, and not just a choice but an act, and not just an act of the mind but also of the body. Many of Jesus’ disciples made their choice with their legs; they walked away from Jesus. If we believe the words of Jesus about eternal life, they are the simplest and best reason for being a faithful Catholic Christian.

One of the great Catholic novelists of the 20th century, Walker Percy, was asked to write an answer to the question of why he was a Catholic. He responded simply, “What else is there?” St. Peter must’ve inspired that answer.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "F. Lawrence".

Wisdom of the Saints

When we think of ourselves,
we are perturbed and filled
with a salutary sadness.

And when we think of the
Lord, we are revived to find
consolation in the joy of the
Holy Spirit.

From the first we derive fear
and humility, from the second
hope and love.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

“Jesus, Our Light, Our Joy” Advent Retreat Online

On December 12 this year there will be a wonderful opportunity for those of you living with chronic pain, illness, or disabilities— as well as caregivers—to make a free online Advent retreat prepared with you in mind: “Jesus, Our Light, Our Joy.”

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) based in Washington, DC is sponsoring the event, to be held that day from 1 to 4 p.m. Eastern time on Zoom. NCPD even included the CUSA logo in their online invitation. To see it, go to ncpd.org and search “advent retreat.” Click on the first search result. There you will also find the link to register for the retreat.

You may also recognize the retreat leader: Maureen Pratt, who for several years was a frequent contributor to *The CUSAN* as a member of GL 61. She now has her Master of Theological Studies (MTS) degree, and among other things, is the executive director and founder of The Peace in the Storm Project, the author of a growing number of books, a speaker, and has her own publishing company, Galilee Road Publishing LLC.

One very interesting fact is that Maureen’s book, *Peace in the Storm* (first published in 2005, now in a revised edition that includes an *imprimatur*), inspired St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan, Connecticut to start a wellness ministry several years ago that used the book for small group sharing. Maureen writes that in 2023, with the collaboration of the parish, “a new model of

parish accompaniment for persons living with chronic pain and illness was formed,” The Peace in the Storm Project. It is a program that uses “a simple, powerful format of fellowship, adult catechesis, scripture reflection, and prayer” that is “helping many to rediscover and reconnect with their faith and God's abundant encouragement and love.” The Project has already spread throughout the United States, from the east to the west coast. In Maureen’s words,

The Peace in the Storm Project is now approved in the dioceses of Boston, Bridgeport, Dallas, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Orange, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., with several other dioceses and parishes in the process of learning more about how The Project can help their faithful with chronic pain and illness. All of this is a great blessing and I continue to thank the Lord!

(From her website: maureenpratt.com)

Recently Maureen shared that “the Archdiocese of New York is now on board with The Peace in the Storm Project!” And that “soon, there will be a new devotional for caregivers—*Peace in the Storm for Caregivers*—and discussion guides for groups of caregivers, too.”

God bless your fine work, Maureen. And I hope many of you will be able to join her at the online Advent retreat December 12.

Peace and blessings to you all.

The Editor

God Chooses the Weak

Shirley Bowling
EGL 4

*God chose those whom the world considers absurd
to shame the wise;
He singled out the weak of this world
to shame the strong.
(1 Cor. 1:27)*

I am one of those absurd, weak individuals. I have never fit into the category of the “norm.” I have always felt like an outsider, and most of my life I have had a great desire to be one of the insiders looking out, for a change. As I have matured these 85 years, I have finally reached the level of acceptance of myself as one of the permanent outsiders, due to my own pure choice, my own pure desire. And that has helped me to let go of the baggage of regret that I’m “different,” that I don't blend into the crowd.

Going through Scripture over the years gives me consolation that some of the weakest appearing characters were actually among the strongest:

Abraham was unknown, uneducated, lived an ordinary life, but “he obeyed when he was called, going forth, not knowing where he was going.” He traveled by faith. He was an alien in a foreign land. God chose this ordinary, weak man “who was as good as dead” and rewarded his faith with “descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the seashore” (Heb. 11:11).

Isaiah considered himself as weak in speaking, telling God that he was a man of “unclean lips.” However, his faith and trust in God's help enabled him to rise above his weakness, and to say, “Here I am. Send me” (Is. 6:8). Many of us weak ones who are lacking in self-confidence gain the courage we need from reflection on Isaiah's faith.

Moses was a “poor speaker, slow of speech and tongue.” He stuttered. God realized his weakness, telling Moses that he had made him as he was. God told Moses to “Go, then! It is I who will assist you in speaking and will teach you what you are to say” (Ex. 4:12). Moses trusted, and set out on a journey filled with peril.

Joshua was an ordinary aide to Moses. He had no extraordinary gifts or talents, but God exalted him, after Moses' death, to continue on with the mission that had been entrusted to Moses (Dt. 1:37).

Samuel was a young boy who listened to God's call: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel grew up, and God blessed his trust, “not permitting any word of his to be without effect” (1 Sam. 3:19). His weakness of not being attuned to God's first calls eventually became his strength, as he learned to listen, heart and soul, and obey.

David, a young shepherd boy, was chosen by God to become one of His anointed ones. He took David's humble inexperience and made him one of the greatest kings in all of Scripture. He raised him up and gave him the courage to rise above his weakness and his major mistakes. David begged God for mercy, admitted his offense, and asked God to cleanse him:

*A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a heart contrite and humbled,
O God, you will not spurn.*

(Ps. 51:12)

Gideon was the insignificant one in a poor family. However, God chose this seemingly weak link to save Israel.

*Go with the strength you have
and save Israel from the power of Midian.
It is I who send you.*

(Judges 6:14)

Peter we all know as an uneducated fisherman who bragged too much and expected more of himself than he could deliver. He told Jesus that never would he allow him to wash his feet, but he admitted his weakness, and willingly complied (Jn. 13:8). One of Peter's greatest blunders was his cockiness over his courage, telling Jesus:

*Lord, at your side
I am prepared to face imprisonment
and death itself.*

(Lk. (22:33)

Of course, Peter came face to face with his weaknesses when he denied Jesus three times. Instead of despairing, Peter was strengthened in realizing how much he needed God's strength.

Saul, who became **Paul**, came from the smallest tribe of Israel, the least clan of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul concurred in the act of killing the Christians (Acts 8:1). Whatever Saul/Paul did, he went at the experience with

intensity, heart and soul. After his conversion he was ostracized by the Romans and the Christians, neither of whom trusted his new life-style. He went from a powerful leader to a weak, ordinary tent-maker. He felt abandoned:

*But the Lord stood by my side
and gave me strength.*

(2 Tim. 4:17)

Some of Paul's weak feelings included affliction, doubts, persecution, restlessness, quarrels, all kinds of stress, and fears (2 Cor. 1, 4, 7). However, Paul rose above these weaknesses and became strong by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10). God gave us one of the greatest role models in all of history, when we are feeling weak.

So, now I hold onto the image of these struggling weak men, and I see that they were types of outsiders, to the extent that God was calling them to a mission outside the “norm.” And they accepted the stigma, the physical and mental anguish that came with their call. So, I will meditate on their lives of “Yes, Lord, send me.”

*He chose the world's lowborn and despised,
those who count for nothing,
to reduce to nothing those who were something,
so that mankind can do no boasting before God.
God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus.
Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord.*

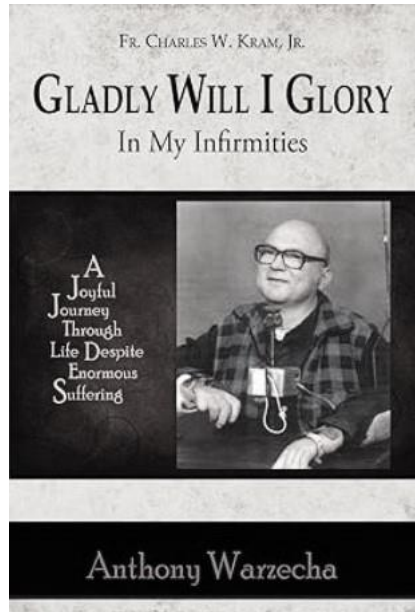
(1 Cor. 1:28)

Thank You, Abba, for making me weak, that I may be strong in You. Amen.

(2 Cor. 12:9)

First CUSAN Ordained a Priest: Also a Future Canonized Saint?

Those of you who were CUSANs in 2015 will remember receiving from Father Lawrence a copy of this biography of Father Charles W. Kram, Jr. (1929–2000), the only member of CUSA to be ordained a priest—and one who lived with such humility, generosity, and love that an association promoting his eventual beatification, the Father Charles Kram Project, had already received approval in the diocese of Victoria in Texas.



For newer CUSANs who have not heard of Father Kram, *Gladly Will I Glory in My Infirmities* by Deacon Anthony Warzecha will introduce you to a young man who, after contracting a deadly form of polio in 1952, lived with major physical disabilities the rest of his life, and did so with joy. At the time he contracted polio Charles had completed all but the final year in his seminary studies, having just been ordained a subdeacon. But so severe were his disabilities that his ordination to the priesthood was no longer a possibility. In fact, it was only by God’s providential design that he

lived. The book goes on to tell the amazing story of how many people he was able to help, even though he himself needed continual help with almost everything, all the years of his life.

When did he join CUSA? And why and when was he eventually ordained a priest? What did his ministry involve? *Gladly I Will Glory in My Infirmities* has the answers, plus much more. It contains this quote and many others from Father Kram: “Our burdens are a privileged sharing in the burdens that the Lord Jesus chose to bear for us. His cross led to his Glorification and so will ours” (p.165). The book can be bought either from Leonine Publishers or from Amazon.

Another more recent book (2020) is *Broken and Blessed: Inspirational Words of Wisdom by Father Charles W. Kram, Jr.* Available through Amazon, it contains a variety of homilies given by Father Kram throughout his years of priesthood and compiled by author Carol Voelkel. It, too, gives an opportunity for more people to get to know Father Kram, and will hopefully add momentum to his cause for beatification and canonization.

For those of you with access to the internet, the online monthly paper of the diocese of Victoria, *The Catholic Lighthouse*, has a section called the “Father Charles Kram Corner” that includes a homily by Father Kram in every issue, as it has for the past several years.

As we thank God for this holy man, let us pray: “May he be numbered among the Blessed in heaven.” Father Charles Kram, pray for us.

The Editor

My God Story

Marian June Rose
EGL 5

I never miss an opportunity to tell a God story because God is a major component in my daily living. My mother taught me and my brothers at an early age to love and respect God through prayer and attending Mass.

So, of course, when in 2014 my brother told me he was thinking about taking us to Rome in order for Mom to visit the Vatican and the Pope, I knew instantly that God definitely had to be part of this endeavor. I wrote letters to nuns, priests, and anyone connected to the Roman Tour circuit. I even made calls. Everyone said, "Private Papal audiences are reserved for dignitaries and heads of state only." Yes, in my heart I truly understood that. But I also know God answers prayers.

None of the tour personnel could actually guarantee that you would get to visit with the Pope. The Pope is his own person; he has his own schedule.

I started novenas, asking the saints to be my envoy. In our living room we have a four-foot statue of Mother Mary gracing our daily lives. Each night, I would put my hands in hers asking that she speak to Jesus and allow Mom to meet Pope Francis. I would mention that Mom was given the Marian Medal, an accolade from her parish for her loving concern for others in her community. I told Mother Mary humbly about all the rosaries Mom has made throughout her 32 years with

the Our Lady's Rosary Circle which she founded, sending these rosaries all over the world to those in need. In doing so, she was extending her faith and hope to those who would treasure her rosaries.

Mother never gets angry at anyone; always a kind word for those in trouble, urging them to believe and return to God. "Do not forget to pray. . . . God loves you," she will say to you. "Whatever you do for others will come back to you redoubled." Mother was going to be 100 years old in December. My brother found out it is too cold in Italy in December, so he chose springtime, which was now, to take us. "June," he asked me, "Do you think Mom could make the trip to Italy?" In my heart, I felt warmth and a lightness, I knew it was God telling me "Yes." I told him yes and I knew God was going to be our partner in this. I also knew that God would not allow anything to happen to Mom. This was going to be a blessed trip. Only goodness would shine upon us.

Then I began to pray for my brother who had a cardiac stent put in six months earlier. He also had a total knee surgery done, and he and I were going to be pushing Mom's wheelchair around the Italian cobblestones.

I remember telling Jesus and Mother Mary: "I know I have so much to ask for in regard to this trip but I know God says, 'Ask, and you shall receive.'" I kept praying. I kept making rosaries.

The night before we left I had a long chat with Mother Mary. "Please, please, ask God to allow Mom to see Pope Francis. She is so worthy in her heart, her way of

life. She loves our new Pope. Pope Francis had taken the name of St. Francis of Assisi. This was extra special to us because for over 36 years, we had been professed as Third Order Franciscans. We also scheduled a tour to go to St. Francis Basilica in Assisi. Now, to leave everything up to God. “Into Your hands I place all our plans.”

We flew to Italy in time to be there for the Easter celebrations. We went to the Vatican and on that day it rained. Vatican personnel came over to Mom and me, and personally escorted us to the front of the Vatican and into a large room. In this way, the handicapped were able to get out of this rain that had suddenly come from the heavens. I saw a huge, huge screen and on it we saw Pope Francis coming out of the Vatican. “Mom, look!!” We were engrossed watching the screen.

Suddenly, we heard cries of joy, people clapping, and then I eyed Pope Francis’s white cap coming *towards us*. Yes, he was actually in the same room, greeting people around us. Then miraculously he was in front of us. He shook our hands. I hugged him as did others. He blessed us on our foreheads. He looked us in the eye and gave us an unspeakable sense of peace within us. It was a vision of white robes embracing the love of Jesus and extending himself to those around him. He was actually right there and we were indeed speaking with him. He did not rush us. We told him of our parish and the Franciscan Friars there, about our Third order of St. Francis status, and he listened intently. I told him that Mom was going to be 100 in December. His eyes lit up

and he turned to her and said: “Oh my, then I must ask YOU to pray for me, and I will pray for you.”

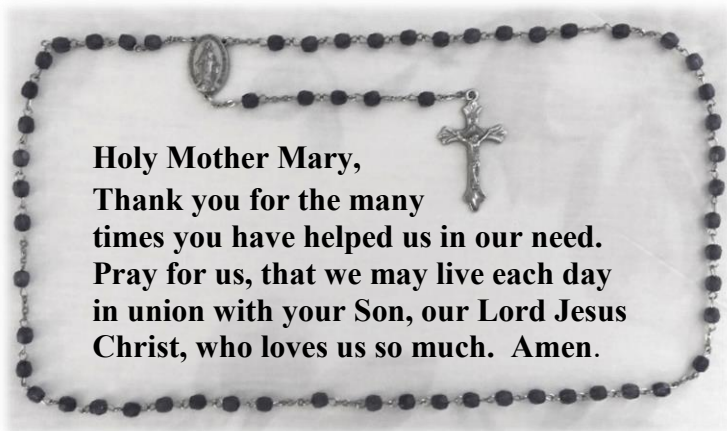


Pope Francis greets Mrs. Rose, daughter Marian June at her side, during their 2014 visit to Rome.

Soon our precious moments with Pope Francis were coming to a close as he proceeded to visit with the next parishioner. The awe of being in his presence came more rapidly to the forefront and we were mesmerized. We got to see, got to be with, got to touch, got to talk with, got to be blessed by Pope Francis himself. We

were not a dignitary or a head of state. But God gave us a miracle, a blessing for Mom. God truly made this happen. This is my God story because God made it rain that day and the Vatican personnel escorted the wheelchair parishioners out of the rain. That included us. And Pope Francis, with God's urging, just happened to feel he had enough time to come and spend with us in that room. Afterward, he went to St. Peter's Square and rode in his pope mobile, touching others nearby. There had never been any guarantee that he was coming to that room.

To make it extra special, that huge screen in the room televised everything that went on in that room. Everyone in St. Peter's Square saw us on the screen with Pope Francis. When my brother saw us, he jumped up and down and yelled, "That's my Mom! That's my Mom!" to those nearby. He was thrilled beyond words that Mom was blessed by the Pope on such a momentous trip.



Looking Back: A Joyful Visit



It was 1999, and Sister Maureen Floyd, OSB, who was flying to Seattle from Philadelphia, had to change planes in Chicago. Leo McGrillen, who lived in the area, came to meet her at O'Hare airport. The joy of this moment—two CUSANS from different parts of the country meeting one another in person—is apparent in this photo, which Sister Maureen sent to share with you here. Just one of the many blessings that has come through being a member of CUSA!

Eucharist: The Gift Supreme

Father Richard J. Hopkins

As this time of National Eucharistic Revival in the United States continues, we share this reflection by Father Hopkins (1919–2017), a CUSA group spiritual advisor who, among his pastoral responsibilities, was also editor of the Montana Catholic Register. After his retirement Father published some of his writings, and gave us the OK to reprint them in The CUSAN. With gratitude we share the following from A Journey of Faith: Reflections on the Christian Life, Supplement IV, 2008.

Once Jesus had fulfilled His mission of saving the human race by His sacrifice on the cross, He was ready to ascend to His Father. On the other hand, He did not want to abandon those with whom He had lived and worked during His public ministry. In fact, He did not want to abandon us.

His divine wisdom found a way of accomplishing both—His Ascension to the Father, and remaining with us as well. By His almighty power Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper so that we might have the benefit of His sacramental presence until the end of time.

“Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22: 19). By saying the words “This is My Body, this is My Blood,” Jesus became present, not only for the apostles, but through their ordained successors, for all generations to come. Jesus is not only sacramentally present in our parish churches for our personal visits, but through the

sacrifice of the Mass, He is food for our spiritual journey through life. For this mystery of the Eucharist Jesus chose bread and wine because they are most readily available wherever we might be. Christ remains hidden in the Eucharist so that we can approach Him and receive Him, for who can look upon the Lord and live? This gift of His love and goodness is almost too good to be true, that the Mass itself can become our prayer of thanksgiving. This bread of heaven not only satisfies our hunger, but it also increases within us a desire for a more intimate relationship with the Lord.

Jesus is also humble enough to remain hidden in the Eucharist so He can challenge our faith. Do we really believe? As our faith in this mystery grows, Christ becomes our *unifier*: we are closer to Him and one another; *sanctifier*: we can grow in holiness as our heavenly Father is Holy; *pacifier*: we experience the blessings of His peace. In this year of the Eucharist, may our faith in this sacrament continue to grow so that we may receive with ever greater fervor this *gift supreme*.



Christ, Our Life,
Our Hope, Our Salvation

God Bless America

Anna Marie Sopko

CUSA Administrator from 1976 to 2007

As I write now, we are preparing for the November Presidential elections. There are more commercials from and about the politicians. Everyone is saying, “Enough is enough. What is America coming to?”

As I think of these words, I also remember the home-helpers we had after my mother had a stroke. They were from Eastern Europe, especially from Slovakia, the country my grandmother came from. They would tell me of the beauty of the country in the Alps. But at the same time they also mentioned the many hardships, especially the poverty in their daily life.

I especially remember Maria. One day she received the good news that her daughter and grandson got their visas to come to the United States. Maria got busy looking at our local newspaper, trying to find a residence for them. There were two places that sounded suitable, and so Maria asked if I could drive her to see the apartments. I was able to do so, on another day. As we drove down, Maria commented, “I cannot believe you are doing this. If you lived in my country, you would never go out of the house, but here you are, driving me about.” Since I always loved getting out, I still cannot believe what it would be like to be stuck indoors all the time.

After World War II Slovakia and neighboring countries were taken over by the Communist party, and

the living conditions went further downhill. However, my mother's Uncle John, originally from Slovakia, was able to visit his native country with his wife. He had a brother still living in Slovakia with his family. His brother had joined the Communist party in order to get a job. While Uncle John was there, his brother drove him around town, showing him all the so-called "improvements." As they drove down the street, passing several embassies of various countries, his brother pointed to one building and asked Uncle John, "Do you know what that is?" It was the U.S. embassy. Uncle John replied, "That, my brother, is 'God Bless America.'" That was the end of that conversation.

Today, with all the commercials about the forthcoming Presidential election, we hear comments like, "What is America coming to?" Yes, there are more and more problems, but we have to remember how blessed America is. Problems we have, many. But we are still "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Let us all remember to pray for America. God bless America!



*"Stand beside her
And guide her
Through the night
with the Light from above"*

A CUSAN's Magnificat

Betty O'Brien

This poem by Betty, an early member of CUSA, first appeared in the August, 1953 issue of this magazine, then called the Newsletter. The poem was reprinted in 1972 for CUSA's 25th anniversary, when the magazine received its new name, The CUSAN. Betty's poem is timeless, a gift to all who "suffer for a purpose," as CUSANs do.

My soul doth magnify the Lord
When grace makes pain a CUSAN's sword,
For then my poor, frail body sings,
"Our Savior's mighty in all things."

While I behold my God in me
My spirit knows humility.
And thus, I praise what I possess,
The grace to keep my illness blessed.

His mercy sanctifies the sword
Which humbles me before Our Lord,
As, stripped of strength and healthy days,
My pride can never spoil His ways.

So, even if my eyes are moist,
Each time I suffer I rejoice
That through His Will in all my pain
I glorify Our Savior's Reign.

DIARY OF JERRY FILAN

The First American CUSAN (1918–1950)
continued from the Winter/Spring 2024 issue.

Because of shipping strikes after World War II, Jerry and his sister are still staying in a hospital room in Paris after their trip to Lourdes, waiting for an available ship home to the U.S.

MONDAY: September 30, 1946

Nothing new except a letter from Stelp and Leighton saying that they couldn't refund our money but that our ticket would be accepted at face value by the U.S. Lines. If that is true, that relieves me of one big worry. We have enough money to live on for quite a while but not enough for another set of tickets.

This morning Mary finished the Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary. She told me the rest of the story while she was dressing me.

This afternoon we stayed in to catch up on our mail.

TUESDAY: October 1, 1946

Another day right here in the hospital for both of us. This is beginning to seem like a bad dream. We know the end of this waiting period has to come sometime but there is no telling just when. It could be this week or it could be several weeks from now.

I had a bad night last night so I slept late this morning. While I was asleep, Mary finished So Well Remembered, a novel she started last night. When she was dressing me, she told me the story. This brought back the old days when Mama used to tell me stories every morning while she dressed me. Mama and Mary are the two best storytellers I have ever heard.

This afternoon Mrs. Fussell came to see us again. She surely kept her word, too. She had the American crackers and peanut butter. She also brought a large bouquet of flowers. Mrs. Fussell said she had received Mary's second letter and that Mr. F. had gone down to the U.S. Lines to see about our passage. He says they really are doing everything they can and that we might get some word tomorrow. However, the men at the Line do wish we would wait for the Ericcson. Mrs. F. didn't stay long, but she is so good and so very warmhearted that she always manages to cheer us up even if her visit is very short.

Tonight we tried again to catch up with our mail. Mary wrote about six letters.

WEDNESDAY: October 2, 1946

Another day of just sitting in the room waiting. Mary had to go out this afternoon but she said the trip was practically a waste of energy. Three months ago tomorrow our French visas were issued and Mary thought we would have to get them renewed. She went to the embassy to find out how to go about it. After standing on line for

about a half hour, she found out that she needn't have gone to the embassy in the first place. The office where the French visas are extended is in the Prefecture of Police building on the Ile de la Cite. Mary took the Metro over and, after much trouble, finally located the office. That, too, turned out to be a waste of time. The visas are for three months from the date of entry into the country so they are good until October 28th. To make matters worse, while she was in the embassy she had a conversation with one of the women there and discovered that the Washington is very much over-booked and also that another shipping strike has broken out back home. Things look very bad tonight. Our chances of getting the Washington aren't very good and the strike may delay the eastward sailing of the Ericsson indefinitely. We are just trying to offer all this up but we can't look beyond Sunday. The thought of another couple of weeks like this scares us. We are comfortable, of course, and we have had some nice times in Paris, but it all seems like such a waste of time. If only we could go back to Lourdes to wait.

By the way, Mary visited Notre Dame and saw the Flower Market while she was on the Ile de la Cite. She was very much impressed by the lovely rose windows and also by the height and vastness of the interior. She said that as she approached the church from the outside it didn't seem very big at all, but the inside seemed huge. While she was there, she also visited an exhibition of the "treasures" of the cathedral. There on

display were many beautiful chalices and monstrances. Some of them were very old. One gift, for instance, was given by Charles X. There was also a little coffer that belonged to St. Thomas a Becket. One monstrance, the gift of L. Napoleon, was particularly gorgeous. It was studded with diamonds and rubies. I would like to have gone today, but Mary was afraid to take me because she thought she might have to wait a long time in the offices.



To be continued

Information that may interest you:

Below are two of the sources Father Jerry Bracken used for his article in this issue about St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross:

Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein: A Biography*, trans. Father Bernard Bonowitz, O.C.S.O. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

Butler's Lives of the Saints, New Full Edition: August, ed. John Cumming (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 76–78.

The quotation from Saint Bernard on page 13 is taken from the Office of Readings for Thursday of the Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time.



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