

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH

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THE TRUMPETER



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“For He Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall arise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so we shall ever be with the Lord:”

1 Thessalonians 4: 16 – 17.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT!

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His wonderful light"
(1Peter 2:9, KJV).

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The hot and hazy days of summer are past, and we are now in the cooler months of Fall. On one of those lazy, hazy summer days, I was watching an American talent show on television. While I watched, a young boy, about eleven years old, entered the stage to show off his talent to the television viewers and studio audiences but, most of all, to the judges. His gift rested in playing the violin.

Before he started his performance, he was asked by one of the judges about his reason for choosing to play the violin above all the other instruments. To that question, his response was, "I was bullied in school because, I was different. I had cancer - Leukemia. When I had chemotherapy, my hair fell off and some people in the class told everyone in the class that no one should talk to me because, I was contagious. So, they isolated me and no one spoke to me for a long time. I cried all the time, I was always sad and unhappy, and I was very lonely in school. Then one day, my teacher said that she would offer violin lessons for free to anyone who wanted it. I asked my Mom if I could take the lessons and she said, 'yes!' I started to take the lessons and I enjoyed playing the violin. I would always stay in my room and practice all the time. The more I play the violin and practice, is the better I get at it. I love playing the violin very much; it makes me very happy."

I will not use the boy's correct name, so I will call him Andrew. During Andrew's performance, he captivated his audience and held them spellbound. He certainly put on a show as he played amazingly well different genre of music. At the end, he received a standing ovation. Not, only that, but one of the judges gave him the "golden buzzer" which meant that he received the privilege of going directly to the final round of the contest.

As I listened to Andrew telling his story about " being different," the cruelty that was inflicted on him, and the isolation he experienced, I was reminded of what it means to be a Christian. As Christians, aren't we called to be different? Yes, we certainly are! Scripture says that Christians, "are not of the world; however, we live in the world." Therefore, it is incumbent on us as citizens to adhere to the rules and regulations of the society in which we live. However, we should not allow the things of the world to control us. As such, we are different - we live differently, we speak differently and we behave differently. We dare to be different from unbelievers. Although, as

Christians, we are called to be different, we are not immune to the societal atrocities that are levied on people who are different from what is deemed the "norm."

Our Christian faith is rooted in Judaism, and throughout the ages God has called his people with a message that they should set themselves apart from those who do not worship Him, and Him alone. This began when God told Abraham to leave his country in Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land that He would show him. That promised land was Canaan. But Abraham went to Haran, the Northern part of Mesopotamia for a while (Gen.12:1-4, KJV). Then God made a covenant with Abraham and his wife Sarah and, promised them that they would be the parents "of a host of nations" (Gen. 17:5, KJV), and that their descendants will be as numerous as the "stars of the sky" (Gen. 22:17, KJV). So, the children of Abraham and Sarah were called by God to be a "special people" who would be "different" from the others around them. Their purpose was to serve Him and worship Him only. Abraham Believed God, journeyed into Canaan with his wife and nephew and lived there. Then Isaac, one of Abraham's two sons manifested God's promise in beginning "the people of Israel" or the Israelites (Gen. 17:19, KJV).

After a time, because of famine the Israelites moved to Egypt and there they were enslaved. Their God delivered them from the hands of Pharaoh who had enslaved them. When they were released from slavery in Egypt, Moses led them through the desert for forty years. At the end of his journey with them, Moses was commanded by God to speak to the Israelites and tell them that they were different from the others around them for He has made a covenant with them to be their God, and they are His chosen people. Moses gives what appears to his "last will and testament," and offers a final blessing and dies before entering the land that was promised to the Israelites. His death is portrayed as the "sealing" of the second law. In the second covenant, Moses reminded the Israelites that they should remember to serve their God alone because, " He establish thee today for a people unto Himself, and that He may be unto thee a God, as He hath said unto thee, and as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob" (Deut. 29: 13, KJV). It seems to me that more than anything else, the story of the children of Israel as written in Deuteronomy, stresses the important factors that Israel is one people, with one God, one sanctuary when they entered "the promised land." These elements not only make Israel a unique people but as a people of God, they should be forever bound together in unity and solidarity. The above elements also apply to Christians; for the Church is God's possession and the object of His delight. Through the remission of our sins by our Saviour Jesus Christ, the call to be different is extended to everyone. As such, we must obey God and worship Him only.

The message of God's people as being different, was also emphasized by the prophet Isaiah. He was concerned about Judah and Jerusalem in the days of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah - all kings of Judah. Throughout their reigns, Isaiah exhorted them to avoid the dangers of alliances with foreign nations; and he also reminded the people of Israel that they were a - "special" people because they were chosen by God to serve Him and to be an example to others. As such, they were different from the others around them. But the kings forsook their God and led their people astray.

Isaiah called the Israelites' attention to their transgression as he said, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel into anger, they are gone away backward" (Isaiah 1:4, KJV). In response to their disobedience to God, and because of their sinfulness, they were exiled into Babylon. While in Babylon, they struggled to understand why God had allowed them to be taken captives in a strange land. During their period of anguish, turmoil and discouragement, the prophet Isaiah comforts them with messages of hope. In his messages, He told them that: "The Gentiles will see their righteousness, and all kings will behold their glory: and they will be called by a new name which the Lord will give them. He further consoled them by saying to them, "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isaiah 62: 2-3, KJV). When they understood that they were taken captive so that they would turn away from their sinfulness, they learned their lesson and repented of their sins, and then our faithful and loving God allowed them to return to their homeland and rebuild it. Seven hundred years after Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Messiah to redeem the world from sin, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and lived among the people of the region.

Jesus knew that the people who followed Him were different from the others around them. He also knew that it would be difficult for them, for they would suffer for their belief. So, He prepared His disciples for the tensions that would exist in the world between those who believed in His teachings and followed Him, and those who were unbelievers. In His preparation He said, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15: 19, KJV). Again, when Jesus prayed for His disciples and by extension, all Christians, He said to His Father: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (John 17: 14-16, KJV). Therefore, for Christians to be different from unbelievers, it is not a matter of personal preference, or ability, it is a matter of divine will.

Shortly after Jesus returned to heaven to be with His Father, the disciples received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit further emboldened the disciples to preach God's love and salvation to all and for all. For this reason, Peter who took the lead at this time, was concerned about the early churches in Asia Minor. In his letter to the members of the Christians in the early churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, he stressed emphatically the notion of God's love for His people as He calls them for His own. In describing God's love and care, Peter uses language similarly to that which was used by Isaiah. "And they shall call them, The Holy people, The redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken" (Isaiah 62: 12, KJV).

In his first letter, Peter also wrote to the new converts giving them a wonderful glimpse into the heart of God as he describes God's love and mercies for His people. He wrote, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1Peter 2: 9, KJV). In the

description above, Peter declares that God has elevated His people to the highest possible level. He, the God of all creation has chosen them and has made them righteous so that now they are holy; they are given the status of a royal priesthood, which means that they should use their position to carry out the duties that are expected of a priest. For all priests should be of good character, with holiness being their first priority, spiritual dedication, total commitment and a setting of themselves apart for God and His kingdom. Peter's advice was, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; |Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy," (1 Peter 1:15-16, KJV).

Having emphasized God's special relationship with His people, and therefore, their being different from unbelievers; Peter wrote his first letter to the exiles of the "Diaspora" who were living in Asia Minor. At that time, Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia and Bithynia were experiencing fierce persecution by the Romans. Emperor Trajan informed Pliny, who was then the governor of Bithynia (c117) that anyone who called himself/herself a Christian; or anyone who committed a crime and is supposedly associated with being a Christian should be persecuted. So, Peter's letter is an exhortation directed to the exiles of the "Diaspora" in Asia Minor, in order to encourage them to stay steadfast in God's grace, in the face of persecution. One, may view persecution of all forms as part of the trials of the end time that the Christian community must experience before our Lord returns (Daniel O'Connor, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019); but, on the other hand, it can be seen as a simple fact of the Christians' life in this world. This could also be understood as an imitation of Christ's tribulations and testing which can be a basis for joy. "For this is thanks worthy, if a man for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it if, when you be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But, if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps," stated Peter (1 Peter 2: 19-21, KJV).

In the beginning of his letter, Peter addressed his readers as, "An apostle of Christ...a fellow elder and witness of the suffering of Christ" (1 Peter 5:1, KJV). Unlike Peter, we as Christians in this age, are not physically fellow witnesses of Christ's sufferings; but our faith informs us that, He suffered and died for our sins. We live in a sinful world, therefore, we who profess to be Christians will suffer because our way of life and behaviour are seen as different from the accepted societal norm. "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit,"(1 Peter 3:17-18, KJV). Little Andrew from the talent show, was unhappy because he was different; however, he held to something good by first accepting the teacher's offer, and then persistently practicing his violin. In the end, he was rewarded by receiving a standing ovation and a golden buzzer for his performance. His teacher reminded me of God's generous offer to all, when she offered violin lessons to the entire class for free. It was left to anyone in the class who wanted it to accept the offer. In accepting the free offer of Christ's salvation, Christians can enjoy God's mercy and blessings here on earth, and the hope

of everlasting life, joy and peace. For this reason, Peter exhorted Christians to remain blameless of all crimes, and if they were punished, they should ensure that they go to their death, " only as Christians."

My dear readers, our God has done amazing works throughout the course of history, such as parting the Red Sea. He also does amazing work in our personal lives like saving our soul and giving us hope in the midst of suffering, and also giving us the Holy Spirit to help us in understanding His word. He provides always for our daily needs. Thus, it is on us as Christians to share God's love and goodness to unbelievers for someone shared it with us before. So, although we are different; (that is, we live and behave differently from the general public) we should not "fear" to mingle with unbelievers. Remembering that we as Christians are called to, "Show forth the praises of God who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1Peter 2:9, KJV), we need to be witnesses of God's love, forgiveness and mercy to those from whom we are different. That is the reason, the resurrected Jesus gave us the Great Commission to, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19-20, KJV). Yes, we dare to be different, but not afraid! We must not be afraid of being contaminated by a world polluted with sin; neither should we be afraid of suffering for being different as Christians. We are assured of protection and guidance always along our spiritual journey, for when Jesus commissioned us to preach the gospel to all people, he encouraged us and comforted us by letting us know that He will always be with us. In His own words He said, " ...And, lo, I am with you, always, even unto the end of the world." Amen! What a fitting way for Matthew to end his gospel! So ends this article as I pray that our being different will enable others to see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5: 16, KJV).

At this juncture, I am extending my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to this issue of The Trumpeter. This is an exciting milestone for the magazine, for this is the first issue of the second volume. So, thank you Archdeacon Michelle Eason, Rev. Deacon Joel Amis, Mr. Brian Hammond, Mr. Dominick Merle, Mrs. Dawn Bontemps and Mr. Angelito Guevarra. Your effort and generosity of time are highly appreciated.

May you all experience a most memorable Fall, and a wonderful and joyous Thanksgiving!

Happy Thanksgiving everyone!

Yours in Christ and every blessing,

Joan M. Gordon, Ph. D

A Time for Lamentation



As I was driving to church one day a week or so ago, I suddenly became aware that I was feeling very sad. A great sorrow was coming over me. It was threatening and debilitating. It seemed for a moment that everything in me wanted to stop. I began to sing, “Yahweh I know you are near, standing always by my side, you guard me from the foe and lead me in ways everlasting,” but the song drifted and instead I found myself in a full blown lament as tears rolled down my face, “This is hard, Lord!

The Venerable Michelle Eason, Archdeacon of St. Lawrence, parish priest of St. Michael and all Angels Very hard! There is so much suffering, so much pain and loss. I want to cry out, ‘enough already!’ We are so small and so fragile. And, don’t you want us to survive? Don’t we matter to you? Lord have mercy on your people here! Encourage us again.”

A lament is a prayer of complaint and trust in times of pain and suffering. It is a vital prayer for the people of God that enables them to petition God for help and deliverance from distress, suffering, and pain. It is meant to persuade God to act on behalf of the community, or individual, and always includes an expression of trust such as the familiar Psalm 3:3, “But thou, O LORD, art a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.”

I was feeling sad because, dear parishioners for whom we were praying for healing, had died. And, as much as I understand that our ultimate healing is the death of our mortal bodies, having to carry on without people I have come to love made me very sad. We have seen much suffering and loss at St. Michael’s this year. A lament is a natural reaction for this time.

I remember when my sister died in 2011, I was advised to write a Lament to express to God all that I was feeling in order to help me process the grief and the great sense of loss that I was experiencing. I did write a Lament, “Lamentation for My Sister”, (see below). It took some time but, in the end, it turned out to be very helpful.

The Psalms of Lament express the very real pain and grief that we feel when the sorrows of our lives threaten to destroy us. Many of the Psalms are classified as Psalms of Lament. The lists vary a little because some Psalms could fall into more than one category. The list below shows 68 Psalms of Lament. Reading one or two that resonate with us is a way to begin to allow the honest expression of what we are feeling, trusting that God will respond to us in love. Sometimes they don’t exactly express what we are feeling so, writing one from our own experience can be helpful.

On her website, Janelle Shantz Hertzler, (journey-through-grief.com) offers the following nine questions to use for writing your own lament, or praying them verbally. Adapt them according to your own situation and way of relating to God.

1. **Address to God:** How do you address God? How do you believe your relationship with the Divine will initiate change in your life situation?
2. **Complaint:** What is your complaint? What anger do you have that may need to be discussed with God?
3. **Affirmation of trust:** Have you experienced God being on your side in the past? Is there something you can look back on and say that you experienced the presence of divine love in your life?
4. **Petition:** What is your deepest desire from God? What do you want for your life situation right now?
5. **Additional Argument:** Having gotten in touch with your desire, is there anything else you want to say to God about your need and why God should intervene? What past situation do you feel like you would like to “remind” God of?
6. **Curse on enemies:** Are there things or people in your life that feel like enemies? How can you bring them to God?
7. **Assurance of being heard:** What do you need from God to feel heard?
8. **Vow of praise:** What can you promise or offer to God?
9. **Hymn or blessing:** What thing/person/event (no matter how small) can you thank God for? What other things/persons/events can you be grateful for?

On his website (<http://www.crivoice.org/psalmtypes.html>), Dennis Bratcher lists the following as Lament Psalms:

<u>Lament Psalms</u>	
Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142
<u>Specialized Lament Psalms</u>	
<u>Penitential</u>	6, 32*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
<u>Imprecatory</u>	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140

Lamentation for My Sister

O Lord, my God, have mercy. Look upon your servant with compassion and restore me.

For I am undone, I am brought to ruin.

My heart is ripped apart like flesh in the teeth of the jackal and aches fiercely.

Tears pour from my eyes like a rushing stream.

I am unable to speak, there is no sound in my voice and my lungs gasp for breath.

A sharp emptiness within me is like a vacuum that threatens to blow me apart.

Like dry reeds my legs give out beneath me and I crumble down to the ground.

The Mourning Dove has sung her mournful song. And my sister who I loved is dead.

I am broken down. Never again will I walk beside her, never will I sit with her again. Never again will I hear her voice.

My sister who has been my companion since my birth, who you, my God, gave me for the journey of life. You O my God, have taken her away.

The Mourning Dove has sung her mournful song and my sister who I loved is dead.

I cried out, "Please don't leave me!" Even still she sank down into silence and darkness never to open her eyes again.

The grave awaits her ashes. But you, O grave you have no victory!

She lives with you O my God, in the light of your glory.

The Mourning Dove has sung her mournful song and my sister who I loved is dead.

O Lord my God have mercy. Look upon your servant with compassion and restore me.

For I am undone, I am brought to ruin.

The Ven. Michelle Eason+

Territorial Archdeacon of St. Lawrence

Parish Priest St. Michael and All Angels, Pierrefonds

WHY?



It can be tough being a Christian at times. It's been tough for many years, more often due to challenges to faith brought on by one's own self-doubt when things go wrong, or bad stuff happens. Those particular challenges can be dealt with when one has a personal relationship with our Lord, and prayers answered, offer a clear reasoning as to why something has occurred. But the biggest challenge is face-to-face confrontation! Not with the Lord, although that does occur, but with those people who confront Christians with that taunting, and often desperate query, "Why does God

Mr. Brian Hammond

allow that to happen? From teenage years to early adulthood, that question/answer situation has been raised by many close friends, business associates, first-meeting acquaintances, family members, and yes, fellow Christians. Answering, or an attempt to provide a reasonable explanation, will differ depending on who poses the question. Probably, for a large majority of people, the answer may be, "I'm not sure I can help you," or perhaps, "I really don't know." Being put in that position without having a definitive answer can produce a difficult conversation. It may also raise the question, "What is the answer?" "Where does one go to get an answer? The Bible? They wouldn't understand the language!" Or, "the internet? It knows everything!" Or, you hear a sermon that offers a look at the subject matter of "Why?"

Such was the case, when a young deacon's sermon in March, 2019, provided his take on the question and offered some reasonable, understandable explanations. The answers of course, or variations thereof, have been out there for years, but it was most refreshing to hear them again with a different perspective. Thinking that many may have missed the moment, the deacon was asked for permission for it to be published. It is hoped that the following story (sermon) will serve as a helpful "tool" for others who are asked, "Why?"

Brian

B. K. Hammond

Suffering is *not* punishment



I don't normally publish my sermons, but a St. Michael's parishioner, Brian Hammond told me that he'd found this particular sermon to be very helpful to him in addressing the question of 'why bad things happen to good people' (especially when this is raised as an objection against the Christian faith), and thought it might be helpful to others as well. So, if you weren't

The Reverend Deacon Joel Amis, Assistant Curate of St. Michael and All Angels

in church on March 24, 2019, or just want to read it again. Here it is!

Gospel text: Luke 13: 1-9

Why do bad things happen to good people? It's a question that humanity has been pondering for ages. We encounter evil of various sorts and degrees in the world, and our human reason demands an explanation, even a justification for the existence of evil. We hear of *moral* evils; such as, gunmen killing innocent worshippers at prayer, or children at school, persecution of minorities, or careless destruction of our environment. Horrifying as these moral evils are, we can nonetheless explain their existence by human free will. Since humans have free will to choose good or evil, there are obviously going to be times when the evil acts of individuals lead to innocent victims.

Natural evil, as theologians call it, is rather more complicated. An earthquake levels a city, a tsunami kills thousands of people, a disease with no apparent human cause strikes down a person in the prime of his, or her life. True, in some such cases we can attribute causation of such evils indirectly to humans as a group. The decision, even if unknowingly, build on a flood plain, or in an earthquake-prone zone, or the effects of industrial pollution, or poor dietary practices which may increase the risk of cancer; these things may serve to *explain* the occurrence of so-called natural evils. But there are many cases when we are at a loss for explanations in the face of senseless human suffering.

However, humans have a need to understand and make sense of the world around them, and a big part of this is explaining the existence of evil in the world. Many people in our modern world, for example, have concluded that the existence of such horrific evil in the world is irreconcilable with belief in God: if God is all-powerful and all-good, why does God allow such suffering to exist? So, the argument goes. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that the inability to reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil is probably the leading cause of atheism in our time.

Likewise, religious people have grappled with the problem of evil in various ways. In the Buddhist faith, for example, this issue is addressed through the doctrine of *karma*. According to the doctrine of *karma*, any evil experienced by an individual, or group of people, is the result of evil committed by the said individual, or group; either in the present life, or a previous existence. It's basically an issue of cause and effect: every action is eventually followed by a proportionate consequence.

But, while our Judeo-Christian tradition knows no formal doctrine of *karma*, similar ways of thinking have long been a part of our culture, and to a degree continue to be so, to this day. Understanding suffering as punishment by God for wrongdoing is an idea common in the Old Testament; though not an unchallenged one. If you're familiar with the Book of Job, you'll recall that Job's friends told Job that his great suffering must be the result of something he did wrong - despite the fact that Job had done nothing wrong.

Such a line of thinking is not part of the Christian faith, or at least, it shouldn't be, as it is not based on the teachings of Jesus. Indeed, at the foundation of our faith is the horrific suffering of a man who had done nothing wrong. But it shows up all too often, whether in explicit Christian contexts, or in cultures claiming to be "Christian." I literally cringe in horror whenever I hear some fundamentalist TV preacher claim that such and such a hurricane, or earthquake is divine punishment upon such and such a group of people, country, etc. for some (very specific) sin. Curiously, these same TV preachers are deathly silent, however, when a tornado, or flood destroys the house of a "good Christian."

In today's gospel passage, Jesus confronts this way of thinking; a way of thinking common in the culture in which he lived. He does this through references to two obscure events. For us, reading this passage in the 21st century, we feel that we're missing some context: what is this about Pilate mingling the blood of Galileans with sacrifices? What is this tower of Siloam? Without going into scholarly speculation about the circumstances of these events, suffice it to say, that these were local events which would have been fresh in the minds of the people to whom Jesus was speaking. This is much like 9-11; an event most of us remember well.

The first of these events mentioned, was a massacre of certain Galileans at the hands of Pontius Pilate. This event is a prime example of "moral evil," because human suffering in this case, caused by a brutally repressive regime. The second event refers, to the death of construction workers who died when a tower they were building collapsed on them. As this was an accidental death, we could consider this an example of "natural evil," because their deaths were not intentional.

But, in both these cases, Jesus emphatically says, that the untimely deaths of these people, in no way implied that they were more sinful than their compatriots who did not die in such a way. Their deaths, whether accidental, or at the hands of their fellow men, were *not* the result of divine punishment.

Jesus says, however, that we too will perish, lest we repent. The fact of having a tower collapse on you isn't an indicator of sinfulness, any more than NOT having a tower collapse on you is indicative of virtue. Having a healthy, prosperous life does not mean we are sinless. All of us fall short.

Earlier I mentioned the law of *karma* from the Buddhist faith. But, while it is an important teaching in Buddhism, it is *not* the goal of Buddhism – *karma* is a description of the problem: an endless cycle of cause and effect, or, to use Christian language, sin and punishment. The goal of the Buddhist faith is attainment of *Nirvana*. This word is commonly translated as “enlightenment,” but, which refers not to intellectual enlightenment, but rather to *liberation*. That is, liberation from the unending cycle of *karma*, an end to the cycle of cause and effect, sin and punishment: salvation, in other words.

The idea of justice, that sin must be met with equal retribution; is a universal human instinct. That is, no evil must go unpunished. Indeed, this is the sense of the Law, “Both the Law of Moses, and the Law written on men’s hearts,” as Paul would put it.

Yet, we know we can never fully live up to the Law. Like the doctrine of *karma* in Buddhism, the law binds us in a cycle of sin and consequence; a cycle we cannot escape from on our own.

But Christ breaks that cycle. The cycle of sin and retribution stops at the cross. God’s grace in Christ; grace given without merit, freely and abundantly – sets us free.

Amen.

THE STORY OF MR. DOMINICK MERLE JR.

A time to talk

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:.." (Eccle.3:1).

On one warm and lovely Summer's evening Dominick and I met to talk. Our topic for the evening centered around personal stories. Everyone has a story, and in every story, there are common threads to which we can all relate. Therefore, as Christians, when we share our stories, it helps us in our spiritual growth. This evening, I wanted to hear Dominick's personal story for the purpose of publishing it in this magazine. We had a wonderful time as we sat, joked and laughed before we attended to the real reason for which we were meeting. When it was time for us to begin our work, Dominick posed this question, "Why is it now that I am talking?" I took some time to reflect on the question he had asked. Then I remembered Koheleth, the person who is said to have authored the Book of Ecclesiastes. In his Wisdom Book, Koheleth suggested that, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:..." (Eccle. 3:1 KJV) "...A time to keep silent and a time to speak" (v.7). According to Koheleth's wisdom, it seemed that, this was the right time for Dominick to speak and tell his story. So, here is his story!

Dominick is from an Italian background, for both his grandparents are originally from Italy. His father lived in New York and his mother lived in Louisiana. His parents met while they were both attending Louisiana State University. His father was there on a basketball scholarship and studied Journalism, and his mother was in the Bachelor of Arts Program. The couple dated while they were studying, and after graduation they got married. In telling the story, Dominick joked saying, "A Southern Belle marrying a Yankee is a different thing all together."

Dominick's parents lived in Frankfort, New York where he was born. He is the third child in the family of four children. When he was six years old, his parents moved to Canada because they had visited Expo 67, and fell in love with the country. His father especially, fell in love with Montreal, because of the multicultural influence, the geography and the languages. He liked the geographical location, because it is only four and a half hours drive to his parents' house. Dominick's grandparents lived in Utica, New York because many Italians live there.

When Dominick's parents came to Canada, they settled on the South Shore in Brossard. Because his parents were devout Catholics, he was sent to Catholic schools. The first school he attended in Brossard, was Emile Nelligan Elementary. It was from this school that he learned about God, and was prepared for his first communion. He said, "I was confirmed by Father Rossi, and it was from the experience there, that I learned about God." Something else happened in his early life to encourage him to draw closer to God. When he was about ten years old, one of his neighbours was moving away. Before he moved, he gave Dominick a copy of the Good News Bible. At this stage of his life, he found it easier to read and to understand, than the King James

Version to which he was previously exposed. As he explained, "I would have had a hard time understanding what the words were in the King James Version, but, when I started reading the Good News Version, it was just plain English. I think in some ways it lit a fire in me, in terms of the relationship I would come to have with Jesus. To be honest with you, I think that my neighbour probably saw that I needed something to hang on to."

Sadly, there was unhappiness in Dominick's home because, his parents simply were not getting along with each other. Dominick said, "I think that my parents tried their best, but they struggled in terms of working together as a family unit." He describes his father as being "a typical man of his time." He saw his primary function as providing money for food and shelter. After that, his job was done as the provider for the family. Raising the children was more, or less left to his mother. However, his father supported all the sport endeavours of the children. On the other hand, Dominick said that his mother was progressive; she wanted to go out and work and she did not like to have to be dependant on his father. His mother wanted to be more involved in all aspects of the management of the house. This tug of war and incompatibility between his parents continued for seventeen years, then his mother moved out of the marital home. They were divorced in 1976. During his parents' separation and divorce, Dominick suffered throughout this tumultuous period in his family's life. He said, "When my mom moved out of the house, from that point on, there were times when I felt tremendous guilt, because as children we had to decide which side we were on." During the divorce proceedings in court, the judge asked Dominick and his siblings to choose which parent they wanted to live with when the case was closed. On this matter, Dominick remarked, "An appearance in a courtroom like this, is not funny; that's not pleasant, because it's not that you love one parent more than the other. But, specifically in my case, my two brothers and sister went to live with my mom. They decided that they wanted to live with my mom, because she was more liberal. She was more easy-going; she did not have as many rules and regulations to abide by." At that time, when Dominick assessed the situation of splitting up the family, he was reluctant to go with his mother, so he said, " Well, that is all good and fine! But my dad didn't really do anything wrong; it's not right to have him living with no one, so I will live with him for a few years."

Unfortunately, that decision drove a wider rift in the family. Dominick said, " That created a friction between them, and us." He shared that he had a difficult relationship with his mother, because she was with the other three children, and he had stayed with his father. Dominick was convinced that his mother loved him, but when she got angry at him, her anger would increase intensely. He rationalized that something might have happened to her when she was a child. He said, "When she was getting angrier and angrier at me, I wondered where does all that anger come from? Then, I think that if she is like that with us, the anger must have come from somewhere. So, I thought that maybe when she was a child: we don't know what her mom was like; her father died when she was fairly young, and her mom remarried. It could have affected her, I'm sure in different ways. I really don't think she meant to be mean." At this juncture, he

thought that by staying with his father it would have allowed him to have a better life than had he chosen to be with his mother. Contrary to his belief, he found his experience to have been the opposite of what he had expected and desired. Speaking of his life with his father, he said, "I was doing domestic chores; doing all the things I had to do in the home to be rewarded. I did it more out of obligation, in terms of wrestling with the question, what did he do wrong? Since I could not justify what he did wrong, why would I go anywhere then?" It was kind of broken! This was difficult, because from that experience, it was hard to know what a normal relationship supposed to look like."

After a while, the family feud ended, but Dominick is of the opinion that he still carries emotional scars from the experience of his parents' divorce. He said, "To be honest with you, I carry a lot of that still with me, in terms of not necessarily obedience, but to carry out a job; do it well to its completion. I know that sometimes, I put my own needs secondary, and unfortunately, for better, or for worse, it is who I am." There are certain factors in his growing up years that Dominick finds troubling. For example, he regrets being denied the opportunity of growing up with his brothers and sister. For this reason, he believes that he and his siblings, have not bonded in the way most siblings do. He expressed his disappointment by saying, "I have missed so many years, and I think that they would have been good years for me to have shared with them. The fact that they may have been involved in things that I wouldn't have been crazy about is not important. At the same time, I still think that maybe, I would have had a closer bond with them." He also expressed concerns about how ill equipped he was for forming relationships, because of the lack of example that was set for him in his home. "From an adolescent perspective, growing up, I would have had an even better understanding of male/female relationship. However, to me it was kind of broken! This was difficult because from that experience, it was hard to know what a normal relationship supposed to look like."

After leaving Elementary School, Dominick attended McDonald's Memorial High School in St. Hubert. During this period of his life, he continued to search for something to which he could hold on to spiritually. At this point of the of his story, he remarked, "Luckily, I was able to find a church in Greenfield Park called, Saint Mary's. It was really a nice Church. I was drawn to it, and I didn't really go to church with my dad. My dad was raised as what I consider an old-fashioned Catholic. This meant that you're obedient and go to church, but it doesn't matter about language, and it doesn't matter about community at all. All that really matters is that you go to church and worship. Worshipping for him means, 'between you and God.' I just could not accept that! I needed something more than just that; I needed to have community, and I needed to know people. I just couldn't go to church and do my forty-five minutes of obedience, and it is done! I can go now and I've done what I needed to do." So, Dominick found solace in Saint Mary's Church. " St Mary's in Greenfield Park ended up being a place that I was able to go with a good friend and worship. I liked the choir at the church, but I did not know the members of the choir. However, I always liked listening to them, I liked the singing. They seemed progressive in terms of the type of worship. So, that was a good experience for me. I think that at times, it really

helped me to get through the difficult stages of my life. For, a lot of times, I was able to go to Jesus and ask him to help me to get through the troubling times in my life, when I didn't know where to turn, and where I was fitting in."

At the completion of high school, he attended Dawson College. While he was at Dawson, he studied Retailing Co-op. That program prepared students for owning and operating small businesses. When Dominick graduated from college, he went into the workforce directly. Although he had studied Retailing Co-op, he had not thought about manufacturing, wholesale, or distribution businesses, because of the cost factor in those enterprises. At the time, he could not afford to start a business of his own. What he thought best for him then, was to work in a store. He got a part-time job in the Cumberland drugstore downtown. After a while, he was transferred to one of the stores in Greenfield Park, where he worked his way up in the company to the position of assistant manager. Later, he was transferred to another one of the company's stores in Chateauguay. He worked in that store for one and a half years. In the beginning, he enjoyed working in Chateauguay, but, after a while, he became disillusioned, because he felt that he was overworked, underpaid, and therefore, undervalued. He said, "I was getting disillusioned with the job. I was working sixty hours per week and getting paid for forty hours. It wasn't a huge sum of money. I think, at the time, I was making \$312 every two weeks."

Relief came for Dominick, when a friend called him, and suggested that he worked for Merrill Lynch, the brokerage firm. Although he had no idea at the time, about what a brokerage firm was, he got the job and he took it. This was in 1986, and he was twenty-two years old then. He enjoyed this job, and he learned a lot about the world of financial operation while he was at Merrill Lynch. He stayed in that position for twelve years. When he departed Merrill Lynch, he moved to CDS. CDS is the acronym for Canadian Depository for Securities. He stayed there for six months. He moved on, to work at Société Générale, which is a French Bank that operates globally. In this position, Dominick continued to work in bank related operations, and then moved into what is called, Derivatives Administration. Again, he found this job interesting, informative, and challenging, but most of all encouraging. He was very happy working for that bank. Unfortunately, in 2011, the bank began its restructuring process; so, after fourteen years, the joys of that job came to an abrupt end. This was a heart breaker for Dominick. He was forty-eight years old at this time and found himself jobless. However, one thing is sure; and that is, in our darkest hour, or in our greatest despair, our God is always with us. Moses encouraged the children of Israel by reminding them that God would never leave them, or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6 KJV). As Dominick tells this part of his story, he said, "I got laid off Tuesday, December 12th, 2011. I was almost fifty at the time, but you recreate yourself and move on."

While Dominick was feeling down on his luck, a most insidious and cruel event took place, and that impacted him tremendously and even helped to draw him closer to his God. Dominick had a friend whose name was George Paris. George worked in the Twin Towers in New York. He was younger than Dominick and was of Greek origin. He was still in university, and was looking

forward to opening his own restaurant in New York, after his graduation. Unfortunately, he was in one of the towers that got hit in the 9/11 attacks. "I thought of our friendship as I watched the horror of the attacks unfolded on the TV screen," Dominick remarked. The intensity of the raging hate was overwhelming to Dominick and he seriously pondered the depth of our inhumane actions towards each other - including the killing of innocent people. Dominick stated that, it is understandable when armies fight against each other, but attacking unsuspecting and innocent people he finds dumbfounding. His friend George Paris, was one of the innocent people who died in the 9/11 attacks in New York, and that touched the core of his moral fibre. "[This major event that happened led me to draw closer to Jesus," was his comment.

Before he was laid off from Société Générale, Dominick said that he was doing well financially. "I was paying on my house; I was saving for my RRSP; I was doing all the right things in a way that I never did before. So, everything was kind of okay," he contented. But, when he reflected on the loss of his job, his friend dying young, and so senselessly; he started to reconstruct the ideas he had about life and living. Previously, Dominick's view of life was that he would work in the same job until he was sixty, or sixty-five years old, then he would retire. After retirement, he would live for at least another twenty years, then he would die. That would have given him plenty of time to return to worshipping God, and Him alone. The stark reality came to him that none of us is able to plan for tomorrow. He lost his "dream job," a few days before Christmas, and his friend was killed before he graduated from university and realized his dream of opening his own restaurant. Those were the frightening realities of life. That truly gave him a new perspective on life, and the zeal and desire to return to church.

His son Matthew, was about five years old when he made that decision. He desperately needed his son to have the experience of going to church, and to know God. He remembered the exhortation to parents in Proverbs to, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverb 22:6 KJV). As such, he fervently desired to adhere to this sound advice. Dominick and his wife Suzanne, were married in All Saints Anglican Church in Verdun in 1994. His son, Matthew was baptised in St. Luke - a Catholic Church in Dollard des Ormeaux. This was done, Dominick claims, for the purpose of appeasing his father. When he made the decision to return to church, he could not accept the Catholic Church because of the unpleasantness that was going on in Boston at that time. "All the craziness going on with the bishop in Boston," he exclaimed. It was then that he found an Anglican Church near his house. That Church was Saint Michael and All angels Anglican, and it is within walking distance of his home. Thus, begun Dominick's spiritual journey at St. Mike's. During his first visit to St. Mikes, he was thrilled with the many young people he saw, the praise songs that were sung, but most of all, he was amazed at the one-and-one-half-hour service. He was accustomed to having forty-five minutes long services when he worshipped in the Catholic Church. He felt good and comfortable at St. Mikes and so, he decided to return the following week. Ignoring the extra time that he had to spend in the service, he went back, and has been attending ever since.

Dominick tried to get his son involved in the life of the church, just as he did, but his son lost interest when most of the young people stopped going, or moved away. Dominick describes Matthew as an independent person who does not seem to have difficulties where he saw the need to reach out to anyone for help. If he had such a need, neither he, nor his wife were aware of it, or as he suggested, "Matthew might have internalized them." Matthew was given the freedom to choose his friends, play the sports he chooses and was allowed the freedom to do what pleases him. "I think his family life at home with us; we allowed him to do basically what he wanted to do. He was a good kid growing up, but he never seemed to need God in his life," Dominick added. At this juncture, Dominick is concerned that Matthew's sense of independence, and his self-reliance have enabled a lack of need for God's presence in his life. He shared the essence of a casual conversation that He and Matthew had. Dominick retold the event this way, "Matthew was excited about an historical Egyptian event; something to do with creation in which he was keenly interested. Then he started talking about Scientology." Dominick showed interest and listened to his son, but, at the same time, he wished that he was talking about God with such enthusiasm and excitement, than about Scientology. Dominick said, "I am still kind of anticipating, waiting, hoping and praying that he will recognize the need for God in his life. Unfortunately, it's like a double-edged thing. For him to recognize the need for God in his life, he's going to have to go through pain, and you don't want your child to go through pain. But he's going to have to go through cleansing in his life, and by going through that pain; maybe he'll find God."

The first Ministry in which Dominick got involved at St. Mikes, is the choir. He reminisced that when he decided to join the choir, he did not know the range of his voice. "I didn't know if I was a tenor, or if I was alto, or if I was a bass. I remember meeting Milt and Bernice before practice, and they came over to me and asked if I were going to the practice. I told them 'yes!' Then they asked me what I was. I did not know, but finally I was labelled a baritone. Technically, I think I am really much more a tenor." Dominick mentioned that when he arrived at St. Mikes, James Armstrong was the choir director. In his view, Mr. Armstrong was a "tough" director. "I think that was a good thing, because it allowed the choir members to grow and to develop," he remarked. Then, he added, "He would let us do things that we did not know we were capable of doing. We did it, and we did some beautiful, beautiful things."

When Mr. Armstrong left the position as director of the St. Michael and All Angels Church Choir, he was replaced by Mr. Hervoje Perric. "He was Catholic and had a very strong and solid Christian upbringing," suggested Dominick. He further described Mr. Perric as loving and compassionate towards everybody. He also said that he was not judgmental, but was very proud of being Catholic. On one occasion, he told Dominick that he was going to church, and he would show him a miracle there. At this suggestion, Dominick was curious to see the miracle that was mentioned. He therefore, accompanied Hervoje to the church. It was John Fisher Catholic Church in Point Claire. They went in, and went upstairs where the Adoration was placed. In relating this experience, Dominick said that as they reached before the Adoration, they knelt and prayed alone. In the midst of praying, a stillness descended on them, and there was simply peace and quietness all around. "I sat down and basically I felt free, and at the same time, I just gave myself the opportunity to release myself to God in the room, for I felt the presence of Jesus, of God. The first words that came to me was 'surrender yourself in the name of Jesus! Surrender yourself immediately! Humble yourself before God!' These words kept going through my head.

By the time one and a half hours had past, I still sat there; and being with God, the words became clear. At that point, I wondered about the word ‘obedient,’ because I felt that I did not have issues with authority in my life. However, I do have a hard time just humbling myself. When it was all over, my burden was released, the tension I had gone into the church with, was gone and when I left, I was much more lighthearted. I’ll never forget that experience, that Miracle!” Sometime later, Hervoje moved to Ottawa, and then to Calgary, where he died of a heart attack. Dominick wishes that he had been able to spend more time with Hervoje before he died; for, he is convinced that he would have learned a lot more spiritual lessons from him. However, he is grateful, and thanks God for the time they spent together, and for the spiritual hope and guidance he received. Dominick consoles himself with the understanding that, “Hervoje did his job, and he did it well.”

The other ministry in which Dominick was involved at St. Mikes, was Bookkeeping. When he took the position, he explained that the plan was for him to replace Bob, during his vacation periods. At the same time, the then treasurer wanted to leave the position so, he accepted to do both - bookkeeping and being the treasurer. He held this dual position for thirteen years, and officially resigned in 2018. Here, Dominick expresses amazement at God's graciousness and goodness in allowing the congregation at St. Mikes to prosper. He said, “Because I can relate to the members, one thing I can say about being the treasurer, is that it amazes me even to this day, that the numbers fall in line every year. It has nothing to do with me, being the bookkeeper, or the treasurer. It is how God impacts people to give.” He stated that enough money always came to the treasury, because God would speak to the hearts of those who had the ability to give, and they did. Even when there was a shortfall, Dominick claims that there was never a deficit. Dominick wants to make it very clear that he is cognizant of the fact that, this suitable financial position in which the church usually finds itself, has nothing to do with him when he was the treasurer, or now that he is the bookkeeper. In his view, “It has to do with God being in charge.” Dominick alluded to the fact that, at the moment, the funds are down, but he stated that he will not stress himself about it, because he firmly believes that God puts people and money in place to do His work. “It is happening, God is already doing that work, and people will respond to it, so, I don't really worry about offering,” he claimed. But he explained that he does worry about the other sources of income for the church. For example, he expressed his concern about rentals. Should there be a decrease in the rental of the church and Kohner Hall; it would be most troubling for Dominick. In the event of a decrease in income, one of the ministries that would be most affected, according to Dominick, would be The Outreach Ministry. He stated that 10% of the revenue goes to the Outreach Ministry, therefore, a reduction in income would affect the Ministry negatively.

Officially, Dominick has never been a member of the Outreach Ministry, but he acknowledges that it is very dear to his heart. He is keenly interested in the welfare of people, especially those who are on the margins of society. As such, he is most attentive to the various projects in which the Outreach Ministry is involved; and frequently offers his time, money and energy to help. He also believes that the church should have a strong presence in our community - both individually and communally. “I need to know my community and support it, for I think that is all part of being Christian,” he remarked. As an individual, his mission is to help people to feel comfortable as much as possible. One of the ways in which he tries to accomplish this task is to smile at everyone he meets, for it sets people at ease. He said, "Just a little smile goes a long way. It doesn't cost anything and it brings happiness to other people."

Dominick views the church as God's people in action, working for the extension of God's Kingdom here on Earth. Hence, he believes that everyone in the church should be active in this very important work. With this in mind, he suggests that "The Men's Group" could be more active. He laments the fact that "The Men's Group" seem to lack focus of their mission. He argued that most of the men attend breakfast meetings, and dinner meetings, but they do not show up for Sunday services. "If, they're not coming to the service, it means that they're not taking the next step. Men's group was created for men to have fellowship with each other and primarily to provide support for each other. However, there are other areas of service that are found lacking," Dominick opined. Therefore, he wishes to see more members of the Men's Group more active in the community and in the church. He contends that these actions will help to encourage others to follow Christ.

Dominick's father later remarried, and his mother also remarried. This situation was much more pleasing to Dominick, because both parents seem to be happier with their new spouse. According to Dominick, "I got to say both of them did better in terms of people that suited each other. I saw a relationship between my dad and his wife Susan, and my mom and her husband JP that was much more caring and compassionate towards each other, and they worked well together. So, just that, I say, 'That's nice! Both parents married again and are happy!'"

At the beginning of his story, Dominick asked, "Why is it now that I am talking?" It seems that he is talking now, because, he is at peace with himself. He is talking now, because his story, like all personal stories, speaks to us of God's love and mercy. Even the hard stories reveal to us the comprehensive brokenness of our world, and our need for a Saviour. Every act, every event, every intervention in Dominick's story, points to the redemption that God designed for us; in order that, He may bring us back to Himself. Now, Dominick is an integral part of the Saint Michael and All Angels congregation. He is firmly rooted in his faith in God, and he expresses it this way: "Some people say that when you go to church you are holier-than-thou, but that is the biggest misconception. They also think that if you go to church, all of a sudden you get your act together. That is also not so, because I am a sinner. I know that I have done bad things. I know that my heart is still opened to Jesus. I recognize that there is authority in this world, and it is not just authority by obedience, or out of a fearful nature that God is going to strike me down for some terrible things that I have done. It is really the relationship that I have with God, with Jesus. Thankfully, this is so, because on my own, or by my own deeds, there is no way that I can go to heaven. If I get to heaven it will be through Jesus." At this point, Dominick has achieved his desire to have the fellowship and communion in the church that he needed; he also knows his community and works in it; he has learned how to form and keep relationships; he continues to sing in the church choir (he enjoys singing), and recently, he has been blessed with receiving a new job where he can use the skills that he learned in college. At the same time, he is also involved in operating his own business. Yes, Dominick is talking now, because he has found contentment. Therefore, he can join the Psalmist in saying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy live from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies," (Psalm 103:1-4, KJV).

OUR CRUISE SHIP CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

On April 27th, my husband Rudi and I, flew to Miami and embarked the Norwegian Line Cruise ship called the "Star." The ship is one of the biggest, if not the biggest one for that cruise line. It carries 1, 400 crew personnel and staff members, and 4,000 passengers.

We left Miami for a Trans-Atlantic cruise to the ports of Ponta Delgada, and Funchal in the Azores, Portugal. We also visited Cadiz (Seville), Malaga, Cartagena and Barcelona in Spain; and Palma De Mallorca in the Balearic Islands. While we were on this holiday, one of the most unusual and exciting things happened. Rudi met a lady who invited him to a church service, the first Sunday that we were on board. There, we met a group of people who loved God, and decided to get together to worship God, have fellowship, and Bible Study throughout the journey.

The group was interdenominational as it was international, and it came together through the efforts of Susan and her husband Arlen. We met on Sunday mornings at 8 O'clock for a service and again, at 2 PM for Bible Study. Then, on Thursdays, we would meet at 2 PM for Bible Study. These Christians were a wonderful group of people, who were just eager to share the joy of knowing the Lord with each other, and with anyone else who cared to listen. It was through this group that Rudi and I met Angelito and his wife Marilyn. Below, Angelito shares his testimony with the readers of this magazine.

Now is the time to shout for Jesus!

The time is now to go and tell the world about the love of God to us; giving His only begotten Son to save us from our sin. Let go and let God! Jesus is coming soon! Yes, Lord come... Amen!



It was the summer of 1987, when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, found me in the Middle-East, as a contract worker. One night, a man came to my room and invited my roommate to a Bible Study Class. When I heard the mention of learning about God, the words rang in my ears, and caught my attention. Fortunately, for me, I am the one who attended the Bible Study that night; and unfortunately for my roommate, he did not attend. At the Bible Study that night, I heard about Jesus. I heard how He came to save us from our sin, and how He died on the cross as a ransom for us all. After that, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Since then,

Mr. and Mrs. Angelito Guevarra and grand children

everything in my life has changed, and I now have peace of mind and joy in my heart. As a Christian, I have learned that we are called by God for a purpose, and that is to spread the Gospel of salvation. Scripture says, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believed on Him should not perish but have eternal life,” (John 3: 16, NIV). As such, my desire is to serve the Lord by sharing the gospel to others; so now, I continue to read my Bible daily, attend Bible Study classes, attend leadership training, and other training seminars.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” (Matthew 20: 19-20, NIV). By sharing the love of God in many ways; such as, doing good works for others, and, loving the unlovable, are some of the ways that we should respond to Jesus’ call to witness to others. Those people who see the works that are done in the name of the Lord, will recognize that He is a loving God. Some one said that, Christians have been called after the name of “Christ-i-a-n,” which means that without “Christ I am Nothing.” There is no Christian without Christ in his/her heart. Jesus called us to be the Light and Salt in this world, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put

it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven,” (Matthew 5:14- 16, NIV).

All Christians should represent Christ Jesus in their everyday living because, they are the extension of His Ministry here on earth. Therefore, they are the Ambassadors of Christ here in this world. For, if our Lord is persecuted, Christians are also persecuted. Presently, Christian persecution is everywhere, and it happens every day. Prayers are diminished in public schools, and Bibles that once were found in every hotel room, and staterooms on cruise ships have disappeared; so now, there is a deliberate reduction of God’s word in public places. Lately, God’s word and His people are under attack. When this happens, some Christians’ faith may be weakened. In this case, let us help them to revive and strengthen their faith; in order that they may stand up for Jesus. It is time to shout in a loud voice that, “Jesus is Lord!” He is the Christ the Savior of the world, the soon coming King of kings and Lord of Lords.

My prayer always, is to be used by God in the way of sharing the Gospel of Salvation wherever I go. Even during my vacation, I always ask God in my prayers to give us the opportunity to give us somebody who will listen to and accept the Gospel of Salvation. Every Cruise we’ve been on, we share the Good News of Salvation; just as we did with the family of Ricardo Ylagan.

I met Ricardo Ylagan and family, last December 19th. 2015, at the Norwegian Breakaway and; our Lord Jesus gave me the opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus to him and his family. And this is his testimony.....

I want to start my testimonial by describing how I felt, “empty.” My name is Rick Ylagan, I was born in Manila in 1967, and currently reside in Oshawa, Ontario. I was born into a Catholic family, and grew up with a strong religious background. We went to church regularly, and rarely missed Sunday mass. During my growing up years, our house was filled with statues of Mother Mary, several Saints, Jesus of Nazareth and St. Nino (Jesus as a child). We prayed the rosary regularly, and followed the fasts on Fridays that led up to Good Friday. I spent most of my youth in Manila, Philippines, and Hong Kong. The Philippines is a very religious country while Hong Kong has a culture focused on material things. Growing up, I was exposed to other religions mainly, Buddhism and Islam. There was a period in my life when I started to attend services at Buddhist temples.

I, personally experienced some great success with work; I ended up in executive positions that was beyond where I expected myself to be. However, during the period of 2012-2015, I started feeling uneasy. I started questioning what this great success was about. I started wondering why as a family, we are so blessed, and is this right? I started feeling that we have a lot but, there’s something missing. I started to ask why I was feeling so empty. Although, we went to church regularly, I felt there was still something missing. I would ask my wife and son what they learned from the homily, and they would just shrug their shoulders. I asked, because, I was not getting anything out of the sermons, it was not relevant and, I felt like it was Bible verses getting regurgitated – it had no relevance, or meaning to me. While I felt this emptiness, and had so many

questions, I could not share this with my family. I felt that if I told them, they may start questioning as well, and we would all be lost.

On October 2019, I was offered an opportunity, by a business associate to pick a vacation. He managed a travel agency, and offered a good deal on either a 10-day trip to China, or a 9-day cruise to the Bahamas; both of which, my family, and I had never done. My wife and son chose the cruise and, the decision was sealed. The plan was that on December 19th. 2015, we would hop on a bus that would take us to New York and, there we were to board the cruise ship. On the day of departure from our home, we got on the bus at 5:40 that morning in Richmond Hill. Then, for reasons unknown to us, our bus was chosen to swing by Scarborough to pick-up more passengers. So, we picked up several passengers in Scarborough, two of which were a Filipino couple. They ended up sitting next to my wife and son, while I sat behind them. My wife found out that Lito and Marilyn Guevarra had been on a dozen cruises, and were experts so, we asked them to guide us, and they willingly agreed.

When we got on the cruise ship on December 20th. 2015, we decided to meet the Guevarra's for dinner that evening. We ordered our food, the food arrived promptly, and as I was about to dig in, Brother Lito stopped me and, asked if he could lead us in a short prayer. We agreed, and, he prayed before we ate. The following day, we met them for breakfast and lunch. Each time we met him with his family, we felt kindness, we had good chats and shared our stories. On the third night of the cruise, Dec 23rd. 2015, while having dinner, Brother Lito asked where we go to church. I told him that we are Catholics and attend church regularly in Markham, Ontario. He asked how it was, and I gave him an honest answer. I told him that we were not getting what we needed. He then asked if we were willing to attend his church. At this request, my response was a firm, "No, I don't want to change my denomination." His response was that it is not about changing denomination, it's about changing the way we worship. "Denomination is not important, the important thing is, our relationship with God." We willingly listened for the duration of the dinner; he then explained about the Gospel of Jesus, and about the book of life. During the dinner, "we prayed the sinner's prayer and as a family, we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior."

Upon our return to Toronto, we joined in the New Year's Day celebration at Brother Lito's house, where we met other Christian families. They accepted us with opened arms and, made us feel welcome. We attended Malvern Christian Assembly (Pentecostal Church) the first Sunday of 2016, and, have attended regularly ever since.

Our family has changed, we have changed (2 Corinthians 5:17). My wife and I read the Bible daily. We pray and give thanks before every meal. We start our day with prayer of thanks. We have a stronger and closer relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ now, than before we met Lito. We used to be happy, but now we have joy and peace. We are not quick to get angry and, we are quick to forgive each other for any misunderstanding. We have patience and are more empathetic with other people. We know those on whom we should be focused. We look forward to attending church service every Sunday, and we take notes and reflect on the message being

delivered. We stay for the full service and stay back for fellowship; we are no longer the last to arrive and, first to leave, as we used to do in our previous church. We attend care groups and monthly Bible Study. We are equipped, and we share our experience and scripture with other people. We have led others to come back, and also to be saved. We surrender our lives knowing who is in control. We know we cannot succeed, or accomplish anything without Father God.

“That cruise,” was very memorable to us for our God saved us. The Holy Spirit worked through Brother Lito to give us an opportunity to be saved and, we made the best decision of our lives. Brother Lito continues to be our mentor and shepherd.

The Lord has given us so much, and provided for us beyond our needs. We want others to experience His goodness as we have; therefore, we cannot stop talking about our living God, our Savior Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Every day, we ask that He guides our steps, and speaks through us. In so doing, He will let us know what He wants us to say to people who He puts in front of us. We are called by God for a purpose that is to share the Gospel of Salvation like Brother Lito did to my family and me. We are servants of the Lord Almighty, and our purpose and mission are clear – to share the truth and save other people.

April to May, 2019, my family and I took a fifteen-night Trans-Atlantic cruise on the Norwegian Star. On that cruise, I met and shared the Gospel with George and Cecilia Martin from Florida; and, with Ricardo and Rosa, also from Florida. Both families accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, before the cruise ended. Praise the Lord, Hallelujah! “To God be the Glory great things he hath done.” Amen!

Angelito Guevarra

Member of Malvern Christian Assembly

Scarborough, Ontario

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Music Ministry

**Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring.**

Text: James Weldon Johnson, Music: J. Rosamond Johnson



Mrs. Dawn Bontemps – Music Director

The Music Ministry at St. Michaels and All Angels Church is made up of several different groups; the Choir, the Praise Team and, also the Hand Chimes. Occasionally, the different groups combine to offer music at special events in the church.

The St. Mikes Choir sang for numerous events during the past year, including Lessons and Carols, Christmas Eve, during Palm Sunday,

Lent and Easter. The choir also participated in the Carol Singing, which precedes the Christmas Eve Service. At the traditional midnight service, the St. Mikes Choir performed two songs. Many thanks to the choir members: Lydia, Genette, Annette, Lynn, Dawn, Sarah, Monica, Helen, Mara and Tim, for all their hard work and effort. They are a small group but, they work very hard. The Hand Chimes participated in several services during the past year. The participation usually involves the accompaniment to the hymns, as was done at in the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. Many thanks to Helen and her daughter Erica, Theresa, Genette; as well as two new participants, Mara and her son, Austin, for participating with the Hand Chimes. This is a special group of people who play the Hand chimes to enhance our church services.

Our congregation has also been blessed with the participation of Bernice Hadden, who has sung solos at St. Mikes for various Sunday services. She sang, “I’ll walk with God,” and a beautiful first verse rendition of “O Holy Night,” on Christmas Eve.

The Music Ministry at St. Mikes provides praise music for almost all the services during the year. This includes singing at the Healing Services that occur throughout the school year. The Praise team is very fortunate to have several members who participate. Alaina often plays flute, drums and sings; while Lydia, Angie, Kelly and Lynn are the regular members of this team. The choice of praise songs is a team effort, and everyone participates in giving suggestions. This year, the praise team also sang several joint anthems with St. Mikes Choir and, a special praise anthem, “Hallelujah Light Has Come” was sung at the Christmas Eve Service.

Many thanks to Lynn who prepares all of the Power Points and files music for the entire year. This includes Healing Services and other special events. This is an indispensable part of the Music Ministry.

The Music Ministry is truly blessed to have a group of dedicated people who enjoy praising God through various forms of music. They reveal the true meaning of the words of the hymn, ``Lift Every Voice and Sing, Till earth and heaven Ring.’’

**Confirmation at St. Michael and All Angels Church, September 15, 2019
with the Right Reverend Mary Irwin Gibson**



From left to right: Dale McCall (mentor), Karen Elizabeth Knechtel, Rev. Deacon Joel Amis, The Ven. Michelle Eason, Rt. Rev. Mary Irwin Gibson, Austin Stauvers and Dominick Merle (mentor).

In the month of January, 2019, Confirmation classes began for Karen Elizabeth Knechtel and Austin Stauvers. Recognizing the different learning needs for an adult and a twelve-year-old, after initiating the two classes together, Rev. Deacon Joel continued with Austin and Archdeacon Michelle continued with Karen. We each used the guidelines provided in the Clergy Handbook which had been written by Archbishop Andrew Hutchison about the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. While preparing for Confirmation each candidate is asked to choose a mentor from the congregation who they perceive as being a more mature Christian to whom they could ask questions about the Christian life and why, after many years, are they still choosing to attend church and follow Jesus. Karen chose Dale and Austin chose Dominick.

At the end of the classes each candidate is asked to write a letter telling the Bishop that they want to be confirmed and say something about why. They are also asked to write out a Rule of Life for themselves that will help them continue living a Christian life and deepening their relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Both Karen and Austin completed these things and were Confirmed by our Bishop at the 10:00 am Service on September 15, 2019. Our prayers continue for them and we remember that part of the Service for Confirmation includes a question to the congregation asking if we who have witnessed these vows will do all in our power to support Karen and Austin in their life in Christ. We all respond, “We will” (page 625 BAS) This we do and will continue doing with God’s help.

The Ven. Michelle Eason+

Territorial Archdeacon of St. Lawrence

Parish Priest St. Michael and All Angels, Pierrefonds

IMPORTANT CALENDAR DATES

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| 1. Confirmation of Karen Knechtel and Austin Stauvers | September 15 |
| 2. Saint Matthew
You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Acts 1: 8 | September 21 |
| 3. First Day of Autumn | September 23 |
| 4. Saint Michael and All Angels
Bless the Lord, all ye his host, you ministers of his who do his will. Psalm 103: 21 | September 29 |
| 5. Ordination of the Reverend Deacon Joel Amis | September 29 |
| 6. Thanksgiving Day in Canada | October 14 |
| 7. Saint Luke
How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good tidings, who publish salvation. Isaiah 52:7 | October 18 |
| 8. Canadian Federal Election | October 21 |
| 9. Fall Emporium Vendors Sale | October 26 |
| 10. Saint Jude
You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8 | October 28 |
| 11. All Saints Day
They are before the throne of God, and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. Revelation 7:15 | November 1 |
| 12. All Souls Day
I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. John 11: 25-26 | November 2 |
| 13. Symposium – Dying and Death | November 2 |
| 14. Saint Andrew
You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Acts 1: 8 | November 30 |

Please note that the Scripture verse written below each Saint's Day is taken from *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (1985).