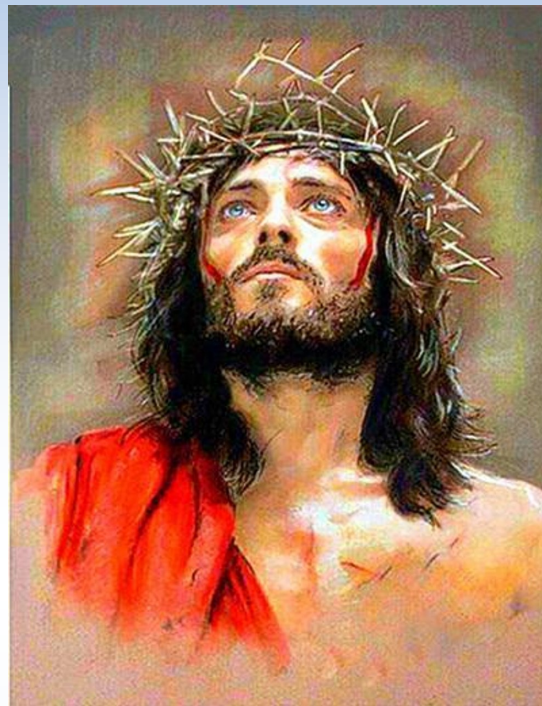




THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RALEIGH CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

THE FLAME

March 2023 issue



Look to Jesus

by Maria Muratore

We wish all our brothers and sisters in faith a blessed Lenten season. On our Lenten journey, let this be the day we give up who we've been in the past in order for us to become who God is calling us to be. *1 Peter 2:9-10. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

What about Lenten goals? Should we be setting them? Yes, but we should be honest with ourselves. We may be setting ourselves up for disappointment by unrealistic goals. Doing a little with love and devotion is better for us spiritually than trying to do too much halfheartedly. We should at all times look to Jesus. Let's think about prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Prayer changes our relationship with God. With prayer, we admit our need for a power greater than ourselves. We become humble when we acknowledge our limitations and let go of the desire to control everything. The process should be transformative. The result should find us opening ourselves up to all God has to offer. Look to Jesus.

Fasting expresses our hunger to find happiness in God rather than feasting in the satisfaction of our physical needs. The control we gain over our appetites helps us to recognize that all true and lasting pleasure comes from God. Through fasting, our relationship to ourselves is redirected toward God. We realize it's not all about us but about God. We're giving mind, body and spirit a reset. Look to Jesus.

Almsgiving provides help to the poor and allows us to recognize that God is the true source of our provision. Lack of generosity stems from a fear of lack. Let's share. Almsgiving is also a way of bringing Christ's love into our relationship to those in our society who are less fortunate. Look to Jesus.

Let's keep our eyes focused on Jesus just as St. Peter did when he was walking on water with Jesus (Matthew 14:28-33). Look for Jesus and keep looking to Jesus. Although a storm surrounded Him, Peter looked to Jesus. The problem was when he stopped looking at Jesus. The message is clear: especially when life is a tumultuous storm, look for Jesus and keep looking to Jesus.

Wandering Sheep

By Debbie Rony

This year, as Lent approached, I began to ask the Lord what He wanted me to give up. I considered, like most of us do, abstaining from a certain food or treat. I thought about fasting more and doing more for others. While I can do all of these things, and will, I still felt like I was still missing the mark. The traditional tried and true methods of self-denial are effective in helping us draw near to God during this Lent and I am not knocking these practices. I just felt in my heart that there was something else the Lord wanted me to do and I was already a week into Lent before I received my answer. In prayer, the Lord brought to me the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14. *“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.”* The Lord wants me to give up going “astray”; I have occasionally “wandered” away from Him at times. My walk with Him has been strong but it has not been without the occasional misstep and I have a pattern of wandering into certain areas that are not good for me. They are not huge sins but rather areas where He doesn’t want me to go for my own good and **to keep me focused on Him**. Each of us have a place we “wander” into. The reasons may vary but the results are always the same. We are distanced from the Lord and from what He wants to do in our lives. So, I began to ask the Lord, “Why do I wander?” I then felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to do research as to why actual sheep wander away from the flock. Their reasons and ours are remarkably similar.

Before I get into similarities, I need to first point out that the parable of the Lost Sheep was spoken to the disciples about His disciples. So often we see this parable as only applying to people who have committed grave sin or even abandoned their faith. The reality is that Jesus has already said the one that goes astray is one of **His own flock** and that also *applies to us*. His disciples posed a question to Him. *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ (Matthew 18:1)* Jesus then begins to tell His disciples that they must all become like children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven and woe to anyone who causes them to sin. He says, *“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by*

whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.” (Matthew 18:8-9) Jesus establishes that the world tempts them, their own bodies tempt them (their carnal nature), and others tempt them to sin. However, **we wander of our own accord**. James 1:13-14 says, *“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”* **This is the context within which Jesus speaks of the parable of the Lost Sheep in the next few verses and how the one goes astray.** According to farmlife.com there are four main reasons that sheep wander off on their own and I believe that they parallel our own wanderings.

The first reason why sheep run off is when they are frightened. Their eyes have excellent peripheral vision so much so that they can see behind them without even turning their head! They tend to be a little skittish and they frighten easily because *their eyes are on everything surrounding them all the time*. Some may panic, bolt away, and soon find themselves suddenly separated from the flock. My point is this: **Fear will either drive us towards God or away from Him**. The pandemic is a perfect example of this. From my observation, fear and isolation drove many people away from the Church, the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), and fellowship with the others in the flock. Fear blocks our faith and this is why God tells us over and over again in scripture “fear not!” Other types of fear that may drive us away from God may be fear of lack: “can’t go to Mass or serve God because I need to earn more money rather than relying on God for my provision.” We may fear for our health: “I can’t do this or that” instead of “what can I do given my situation?” Many Christians have a fear of the cancel culture, criticism, and ridicule: “My family, friends, and co-workers will retaliate against me for standing up for my faith.” However, 1 Peter 4: 14 says, “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” The point is that all of us have some fear in us. Rather than withdrawing and trying to go it alone, we should **move towards God with our fear**. “Draw near to God and purify your hearts, you men of double mind.” (James 4:8) We tell him our fear, surrender our fear to Him, and ask Him to give us courage. The gift of **Fortitude** is a gift of the Holy Spirit! The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles, in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions.

Wandering Sheep Continued...

It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice in his life in defense of a just cause. "The Lord is my strength and my song." "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". (CCC 1808)

Interestingly, sheep have something called a "flight zone" which is their bubble of safety. This is their own personal space where others that they trust are allowed to enter without making them frightened or cause them to flee. This reminds me of the "social bubble" I had during the pandemic which was so important to maintaining my faith. I met with just a handful of people to pray and fellowship and it was like a lifeline for my faith! We should all have a few close friends so when fear comes, we can maintain our own safety bubble of safety.

The second reason that sheep wander is distraction. In the sheep world they call it "curiosity". Apparently, sheep are curious creatures and are easily distracted by things that catch their attention. They will turn aside from the flock to investigate and soon find themselves in the middle of nowhere! Curiosity was actually one of the first sins of Eve in the Garden. "*So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.*" (Genesis 3:6) Eve was distracted and delighted in her "eyes." We are living in a world chocked full of eye-catching distractions. In scripture the eye has an important role in our spiritual lives. "*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness, how great is the darkness!*" (Matthew 6:22-23) Social-media, movies, television, smart phones, and access to information 24/7 on the internet is enough to distract even the most self-disciplined soul. **Sacred silence** has always been promoted by the Church as a way of drawing near to God. As we journey through Lent this becomes an invaluable tool to ridding ourselves of the things that distract us from our walk with God. I am convinced that this is why Jesus went away so often by Himself to pray. He went up mountains and into the wilderness. He could have prayed in a house, on the beach, or in the temple. Instead, when going off alone, he went to quiet, deserted places to commune with his Father. After His baptism in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert for 40 days in the wilderness in order to prepare Him for His ministry. If you have ever seen the "wilderness" in the Holy Land it's nothing but rocks and dirt. There is not much to do, look at, or even focus on **other than God.**

There was nothing there to distract Him other than the temptations of the devil. He needed single minded focus to battle the temptations...and so do we.

I decided to give up YouTube and Facebook as part of my Lenten sacrifice to keep me from wandering. I wasn't watching anything sinful but it was just a way to kill time. It is a bad habit that many of us have. Go out anywhere in public and everyone has a phone in their hand and they are looking at it constantly. Its an easy distraction for us all because it is in our hands all the time. I love that what Jesus said 2000 years ago is still so applicable today: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30)

One particular type of curiosity that is alarming is the prevalence of New Age philosophy and practices as well as the occult. People are searching for a "supernatural" experience and rejecting God has had them wandering off into investigating other phenomena. It seems to be "anything but God." This is most prevalent today in our youth and young adults. They are immersed in demonic television shows, movies, music, and events promoting every type of demonic cult. There are fortune tellers, witchcraft (re-labeled as Wicca), demonic video games and board games, Reiki, Yoga, crystals, and many more things that promote every kind of counterfeit spirit. It's all out in the open now. What is even more alarming is that these things have found their way into the Body of Christ. In healing prayer ministry myself and others have encountered many Christians who have "mixed" their Christian faith with these New Age and Occult practices. In doing so, they have given an open door for demons to come into their lives and that of their families. Listen to any exorcist and he will tell you from his own experience how many demons have oppressed and possessed good people because of this mixing of their spirituality from any of the things mentioned above even if they did not have full knowledge of what they were dabbling in. In regard to Zen, Yoga and other Eastern types of Meditation, there is a 23 page document written by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1989 released by the Congregation For The Doctrine of Faith called "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian Meditation." "This addresses the issues of Christian Meditation and warns the faithful of seeking alternative types of meditation and the sensations they may produce in the person."

Wandering Sheep Continued...

“Some physical exercises automatically produce a feeling of quiet and relaxing, pleasing sensations, perhaps even phenomena of light and of warmth, which resemble spiritual well-being. To take such feelings for the authentic consolations of the Holy Spirit would be a totally erroneous way of conceiving the spiritual life. Giving them a symbolic significance typical of the mystical experience, when the moral condition of the person concerned does not correspond to such an experience, would represent a kind of mental schizophrenia which could also lead to psychic disturbance and, at times, to moral deviations.” (Ratzinger and Pavone 1989)) Since the time this document has been written there has been an explosion of yoga in the United States and some churches even sponsor classes! In regard to the occult like Wicca, sorcery, crystal healing, Reiki, astrology, psychics, fortune tellers, tarot cards, demonic games (ex. Ouija Boards), the Catechism clearly states “All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one’s service and have a supernatural power over others-even if it were for the sake of restoring their health-are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. Spiritism often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it...” (CCC 2117)

The devil knows that we humans have a built-in sense of the supernatural because God created us to have supernatural knowledge and experience of the Divine in Him. “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*” (*Confessions*, St. Augustine) The enemy uses this hunger for the Divine to entice our curiosity to his own advantage. Unfortunately, people seek out the divine in other areas. St. Augustine also wrote in *Confessions*, that, “in the aeons before creating heaven and earth, God **fashioned hell for the inquisitive.**” **We have been warned.**

Stay tuned next months issue of The Flame for Part 2 of “Wandering Sheep”

For a more extensive review and examination on The Catholic Church’s position regarding New Age/Occult/ Eastern Meditation please visit:

[Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian Meditation – Orationis formas \(vatican.va\)](#)

[Jesus Christ The Bearer Of The Water Of Life - A Christian reflection on the New Age \(vatican.va\)](#)

Upcoming Events

March 17th, 2023

Winter Jam 2023 Christian Concert PNC Arena Raleigh NC 6:00 pm

<https://www.pncarena.com/events/detail/winter-jam-2023>

March 25th, 2023

Magnificat Catholic Women's Ministry Lenten Brunch

The Power of Prayer and Perseverance: Glory Stories

Guest Speaker: Debra Rony

11:00am-2:00pm St. Ann Catholic Church, Parish Hall

4057 US BUS-70 Clayton NC 27520

Registration Information: Online Tickets are \$23 per person

Or \$22 per person if you pay by mail. To Register go to:

<https://magnificat-ministry.net/chapters/chaptersttes-n-o-nc-clayton>

No tickets sold at door

For more info, please call Peggy Morgan 919-243-2636 or email

Magnificatclaytonnc@gmail.com

April 1st, 2023

Lenten Online Deliverance Retreat

11am-2pm With Exorcist Msgr. Rosetti

Register at : <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7701698950683745116>

April 28th-29th, 2023

Ignited by Truth 20th Anniversary Conference

Friday Night Praise and Worship Event/Saturday Conference

For more info please go to: <https://dioceseofraleigh.org/event/ignited-truth-catholic-conference-0>

Upcoming Events

May 20th, 2023

Life in the Spirit Seminar

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church , Raleigh NC

Registration Details TBA

August 5th, 2023

Save the Date! Living in the Power of The Holy Spirit Workshop

St. Mary Magdalene Church, Apex NC ,

August 18th, 2023

Save the Date! Mass and Healing Service

St. Michael the Archangel Church, Cary NC

October 21st, 2023

Save the Date! Diocese of Raleigh Centennial Eucharistic Congress