Sometimes Lonely, But Never Alone

Serving the Spiritual Needs of Our Homebound Parishioners

It’s not something people like to think about. For those who’ve watched the health of a family member or close friend decline with age or illness, it can be painful to see their suffering. However, God is still present in these difficult moments, ready to generously give hope and strength in the midst of struggle.

Loy Banez, and others who serve our homebound parishioners, are often a beacon of hope in what can be a very lonely time. In many cases, the simple act of bringing Holy Communion to someone who is too ill to attend Mass can bring great consolation. These visits also serve to remind homebound parishioners that their parish family cares about them, even when they are not able to be physically present.

Loy, who has been serving in this ministry for the past 16 years, visits 23 parishioners each week.

“I bring Communion and give Gospel reflections to the homebound, to share the love of Christ and the parish family with them,” Loy says. “We start with the opening prayer, then the Gospel reading, some reflection, the Lord’s Prayer,

For those who are homebound, volunteers bring Communion, read the Scriptures and pray with them.

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and [I] give them Communion. Then we talk a little bit...”

According to Loy, his appreciation of the ministry has grown over the years, both in realizing how much parishioners look forward to the visits, as well as in enjoying the ministry more himself.

“They are very happy to see me,” Loy says. “In fact, some will ask me [where I was], if I did not show up the week before.”

The visits are an opportunity for Loy to encourage those who may be struggling, and remind them of God’s love and faithfulness.

“I hope that the people experience the love of God,” he says.

Serving homebound parishioners in this way has also been a blessing to Loy and helped him grow closer to God by serving those in need.

“[Serving in this ministry has] made me stronger in my faith, and closer to God,” says Loy, who says he particularly enjoys taking time to reflect on the Gospel with those he visits. “It helps me think about what God wants me to do in my life.”

Loy hopes to involve more people in this ministry, sharing God’s love with those unable to come to the parish. Those who want to become involved serving in this way will first become Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Following that training, they will then accompany Loy, or another minister, on visits to those who are homebound, before visiting parishioners on their own.

There is truly no greater gift to a person suffering than this reminder that they are not alone. Not only are they loved by their parish family, and but even more importantly, they are loved by their heavenly God.

If you are interested in becoming involved with this ministry, or have a loved one who is homebound and would like to receive Holy Communion, please contact the parish office at 650-873-2282.
This is a time of many celebrations in the Church. The list is almost endless at this time of year – First Communions, Confirmations, graduations, and weddings. There are so many events that bring people who are not from the parish, or even members of the Church, into our parish.

You may recall that we speak of the Four Pillars of Stewardship – Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service. I want to particularly speak of that pillar of Hospitality this month. It is important every day of every year and at everything we do as a parish community. However, at this time of year, when there may be strangers and newcomers in our midst, it becomes even more important.

Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. In Matthew 25:35, the Lord speaks to us in terms of expectations when He says, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” He makes it clear to us that whenever we welcome any of His brothers and sisters, we welcome Christ Himself. Sometimes, we may think that this concept of hospitality is the responsibility of a committee, ministry or group of people assigned that task – but the truth is that we are all part of the parish hospitality effort.

If we are going to be a stewardship parish, and if each of us is going to be a good steward, we need to be aware that we need to seek and find Christ in everyone around us, everyone we meet, and certainly everyone who enters our church or other parish facilities.

Hospitality is a parish priority that each of us must take to heart. It is not so challenging to greet someone, smile at them and welcome them – yet, it may require a little extra effort on our part. That means we must have an awareness of those near us, of those who may appear to be alone or new. We may not always think of Christ in this way, but if we carefully listen to Holy Scripture, we must realize that He was a caring, welcoming and friendly person. If we are to be His disciples, we need to be the same.

As stated, Jesus assures us that when we welcome others, we are welcoming Him, as well. St. Paul once said that people who are hospitable sometimes entertain angels. For us, parish hospitality is not an option. It is our way to model the Kingdom of God right here and right now.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Rene Ramoso
Pastor
Thanks to her grandmother’s example, parishioner Rosalinda Lopez has always had a special love for the Blessed Mother. Yet, Mary did not truly become central to Rosalinda’s spirituality until 1996, when Rosalinda joined the Legion of Mary here at St. Augustine. Having recently being diagnosed with a serious illness, Rosalinda went to Church one day seeking guidance and comfort from a priest. There, she came across one of the weekly Legion of Mary gatherings.

“I liked what they were doing,” Rosalinda says. “And that started my love for the Legion and my service. I wanted to serve the Lord through His Mother Mary.”

The Legion of Mary, explains Rosalinda, is a worldwide lay apostolic association within the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to promote holiness in its members by “serving others under the banner of Our Lady’s leadership.” Evangelization is at the heart of the Legion as members are expected to go out into the world and perform “substantial outreach work.”

“You are called to make yourself holy through apostolic work – service to others and through prayer, most especially the Rosary,” Rosalinda says. “The outreach that we do is so important because we Catholics must evangelize. So, we members don’t just stay in the comfort of our church, but we go out into the community visiting homes, visiting the sick, and visiting hospitals.”

Active members of the Legion of Mary meet weekly within small groups called praesidiums where they enjoy fellowship with one another, communal prayer, and finally report on their apostolic work. Through these reports, members are provided with both accountability and encouragement.

“You meet in order to grow closer to each other and to inspire one another,” Rosalinda says. “We go out and do our works in pairs, and our object is to help everyone get to heaven.”

The Legion’s work is widespread, encompassing many different forms of outreach, such as bringing Holy Communion to the elderly and homebound, assisting with CCD instruction, taking on various pro-life works, counseling, and coordinating the...
transfer of the Pilgrim Mary among parishioners’ homes.

“It is a wonderful work,” Rosalinda says. “It is not always easy, but it is so rewarding, especially when you see that positive response. For example, when a homebound person dies peacefully after receiving Holy Communion, or when a family that was formerly separated reunites after receiving prayer and counseling from us.”

Through her years as a member of the Legion, Rosalinda has witnessed her own life be transformed both spiritually and physically. In fact, today she has fully recovered from her illness – something she attributes to Our Lady’s care.

“I do not actually know how I got through my illness if not through Mary,” Rosalinda says. “Even when I was sick, I did not quit my work – I did not quit the Legion. I feel like no matter how physically tired I am, I always feel revived and refreshed after my apostolic work.”

Besides enabling individuals to live out their call to discipleship, the Legion of Mary is also a way to honor our Lord’s mother. Described by Rosalinda as the “greatest intercessor,” our Lady is always eager to help her earthly children. In the process, she always points us back to her Son, leading us in holiness and working tirelessly to strengthen the Church.

“The Blessed Mother is the mother of all,” Rosalinda says. “We have an earthly mother and we have a Heavenly Mother. Ask for her help. She is the best intercessor, bringing about many small miracles for her children.”

Parishioners are always welcome to attend one of the five praesidiums offered at St. Augustine, discovering for themselves what the Legion is all about. For more information on the Legion of Mary, please contact Rosalinda Lopez at 650-245-1867 or Lita Songco at 650-270-8985.
The word “talent” often conjures up images of stage performers in the spotlight, captivating awestruck audiences with their impeccable musical or acting skills.

While these talented performers are certainly deserving of applause, the majority of the population sits hidden in the shadows, staring on in amazement while feeling overlooked — and perhaps wishing to possess such talents themselves. But even when we feel overlooked and untalented, God knows better. As Christians, we are all called to dig deep and trust that we are specially blessed with valuable talents and abilities, even if our talents aren’t so obvious or don’t garner applause and accolades.

Along with “time” and “treasure,” “talent” is one of the “three Ts” of stewardship. Exploring our natural inclinations and preferences, especially when guided by the intricacies of our unique personalities, can unearth God-given talents.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit,” writes St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians. “There are different forms of service, but the same Lord.”

Some people have the gift of working peacefully with children. Equipped with patience and gentleness, they are able to guide young souls to the Lord. Yet, others shudder at the thought of a classroom full of 5-year-olds, and instead seek the quiet solace of behind-the-scenes tasks — cleaning the church, sewing altar cloths or stuffing envelopes.

Our interests and abilities are varied, and our volunteer options are endless, as we are called to give our talents back to God in loving service. Examine your heart and prayerfully discern your gifts, then direct those gifts towards serving the people of God.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr., author of Life’s Little Instruction Book, once said, “Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if it is going to be forwards, backwards, or sideways.”

If our gifts of talent are not guided by the discipline of prayer, just like an octopus on roller skates, we will get nowhere fast! Yet, if we keep our eyes on the goal of heaven and serve the Lord with joyfulness, our efforts will produce a bountiful harvest. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”

The next time you sit quietly in the shadows behind a glaring stage spotlight, rest assured that your talents are no less impressive in the eyes of God, and will always be “applauded” when directed to the service of His people.
It started with a challenge.

Several years ago, St. Augustine’s office staff hired a landscaper to tend to the parish grounds. The results, parishioner Tess Hernandez quickly noticed, were exactly impressive.

Much like many in Jesus’ time thought nothing good could come out of Nazareth, the staff had been told the soil was bad and that nothing good would grow there. But Tess, a believer both in Jesus and in the transformative power of gardening, took it upon herself to prove the parish staff wrong.

“I said, ‘No, we can do something,’” she says. “It was like a challenge. I just wanted to prove that it could be done.”

Little did the staff know that Tess had a serious green thumb, cultivated during years spent helping bring in the harvest at her grandmother’s farm in the Philippines. She gathered a few friends from some other ministries, and one bright Saturday morning, they got to work on the church grounds. It’s a weekly tradition that has evolved to become the Landscaping Team and has continued ever since.

“Rain or shine, we’re at the church every Saturday,” Tess says. “The best thing is that it’s, not only do we beautify the church and a lot of people appreciate what we’re doing, it’s the bond that develops between us,” Tess says.

Tess says her co-volunteers have become like family. The group has subdivided sections of the parish grounds to keep the work from becoming overwhelming. As one volunteer finishes their section, they’ll often move over to help in another. Their dedication paid off in 2014 when the Landscaping Team won an award for San Francisco’s Best Commercial Landscaping by the City of South San Francisco.

“We didn’t even enter – someone nominated us and we won,” Tess says. “We’ve been asked to do private contracts. They thought the church was paying us, but it’s all volunteer work.”

Dealing with San Francisco’s wind and temperamental weather, not to mention the drought, has been a challenge. But Tess says she often feels like she’s had some heavenly help in getting plants to thrive.

“Planting or choosing what to plant is a big challenge,” she says. “We rely on donations and we...
usually buy distressed plants. These plants grow
and we seldom buy plants because these regional
plants multiply. What’s funny is, sometimes it’s like
a divine guidance of what types of plants we should
have. I really believe God is working through us. I
consider myself lucky – and not just me, but our
volunteers – because it’s not just that we’re doing
something for somebody above, but you also feel
good because you’re doing it for somebody here.”

Tess says she would love to see some more people
volunteer to help with the Landscaping Team be-
cause as she puts it, “we’re not getting any younger.”
She adds that she would like to thank volunteers
Manny Almojuela, Elmer Macaraeg, Bert Tandoc,
and Cora Tugade as well as the parish staff.

“We’re so thankful for Patricia Abdelalim, our
biggest supporter, and for Fr. Rene,” she says.
“They’re very appreciative and whatever we need,
you say, ‘Go ahead, buy it.’ The best thing is that
they trusted me.”

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Those who wish to volunteer with the Landscaping Team may contact Tess Hernandez at 650-296-9795.