

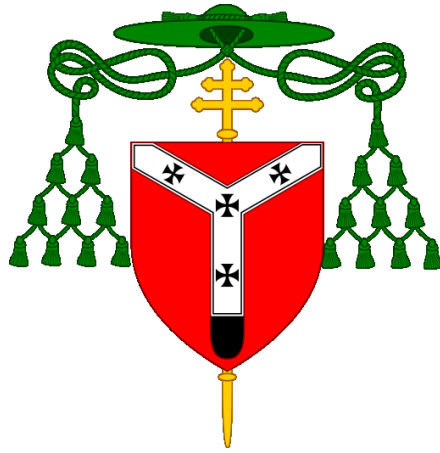
# SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD

## *A Monthly Miscellany*



*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

Romans 8:31-35



## St Paul's Harefield

*His eminence John Carmel, Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster, has this day canonically erected the above parish of Harefield, and dedicated it to Saint Paul, Apostle of the nations.*

*5<sup>th</sup> April 1967*

**Parish Priest: Father James Mulligan**

2 Merle Avenue, Harefield

UB9 6DG

07809 398171 01895 822365

Email: [harefield@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:harefield@rcdow.org.uk)

Mass daily at 9.15am ... Sunday Vigil Mass: Saturday 6.30pm

Sunday Masses: ... 9.00am and 11.00am

Holy Hour Monday: ... 9.45am - 10.45am

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: ... Friday 8.30am, Saturday 8.30am

Rosary each weekday morning after Mass

Confessions: 6.00pm Saturday – or indeed any time that a priest is available

Online Morning Prayer: 8.00am

Online Night Prayer: 9.00pm

**Please note: St Paul's church is live-streamed 24 hours per day**

## SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD WELCOMES YOU

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, thinking of marriage, married, divorced, widowed, well-heeled or down at heel or down and out.

We especially welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers or bored teenagers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or Maria Callas or Roy Orbison - or just mime (lip synch) or hum quietly to yourself.

You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing,' just woken up or just got out of bed the wrong side or just got out of prison. Whether a high flyer or a plodder.

You'll fit in here if you are a classical music aficionado or a punk rocker. You're welcome whether you are a cool dude or not, if you are an Elvis fan, a Johnny Cash fan, a Heavy Metal fan or (God forbid) a fan of Barclay James Harvest.

We don't care if you're more Christian than Pope Francis or Saint Mother Teresa, or haven't been to church since Christmas twenty-five years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who have come only to scoff.

We welcome keep-fit mums, golf widows, football dads, joggers, bikers, starving artists, tree-huggers, line dancers, latte sippers, vegetarians, vegans, bumper sticker philosophers, existentialists, logical positivists and junk-food eaters.

We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted.

We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like 'organised religion' or have anger management issues.

We offer a welcome to those who believe in the Loch Ness Monster.

We welcome those who are tattooed, pierced, both or neither.

We offer a special welcome to those who took the wrong turning and wound up at Saint Paul's by mistake.

We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, day-dreamers, doubters ... and you.

A Warm Welcome to you from Saint Paul's Harefield

# SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD

## A Monthly Miscellany

December 2023

The first two days of December fall during the liturgical season known as **Ordinary Time** and is represented by the liturgical color green. The next 22 days fall during the liturgical season of **Advent** and are represented by the liturgical color purple—a symbol of penance, mortification and the sorrow of a contrite heart. The remaining days of December mark the beginning of the **Christmas** season. The liturgical color changes to white or gold—a symbol of joy, purity and innocence.

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### Feasts for December 2023

3. **FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**, *Sunday*
6. *Nicholas*, *Opt. Mem.*
7. *Ambrose*, *Memorial*
8. **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY**, *Solemnity*
9. *Juan Diego (USA)*, *Opt. Mem.*
10. **SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**, *Sunday*
11. *Damasus I*, *Opt. Mem.*
12. **Our Lady of Guadalupe (USA)**, *Feast*
13. *Lucy*, *Memorial*
14. *John of the Cross*, *Memorial*
17. **THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, GAUDETE SUNDAY**, *Sunday*
20. *Ember Wednesday*
21. *Peter Canisius*, *Opt. Mem.*
22. *Ember Friday*
23. *John of Kanty*; *Ember Saturday*, *Opt. Mem.*
24. **FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**, *Sunday*
25. **NATIVITY OF THE LORD (Christmas)**, *Solemnity*
26. *Stephen*, *Feast*
27. *John, Apostle*, *Feast*
28. *Holy Innocents*, *Feast*
29. *5th Day in the Octave of Christmas*; *Thomas Becket*, *Opt. Mem.*
31. **Feast of the Holy Family**, *Feast*

**8<sup>th</sup> December**

**Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the solemn dogma defined by Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1854**



**The Immaculate Conception (c. 1618) by Diego Velazquez**

Hail Mary, full of grace." For thousands of centuries, millions of times per day the Virgin Mary is greeted by the faithful with the greeting of the Archangel, that we hear resonating anew in today's Gospel. The sons of the Church learn from the words of the Archangel Gabriel that the fullness of the mystery of God's grace was realized in Holy Mary. St Paul the Apostle teaches us that the Father made all

fullness dwell in His Incarnate Son (c.f. Col 1:12-20), which overflows from Christ's head and spills out on His Mystical Body that is the Church. Before descending in Body, Christ's fullness was spread in a unique and unrepeatable way on Mary, predestined from eternity to be the Mother of God.

Significantly in the first reading, the liturgy recalls the figure of Eve, the mother of all the living. The Fathers of the Church saw in Mary, the new Eve that unties the knot bound by the first woman. The knot of disobedience tied by Eve, was untied by the obedience of Mary. As Eve was created in purity and integrity, also the new Eve was miraculously preserved from the contamination of original sin because she had to give humanity the Word, who was incarnated for our ransom.

Saint Irenaeus compares the virginity of the pure earth from which Adam was drawn to the virginity of the immaculate humanity of Mary from which the Second Adam was drawn. 'And as the protoplast himself, Adam, had his substance from untilled and as yet virgin soil (for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground (Genesis 2:5) so did He who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam [into Himself], from Mary, who was as yet a virgin' (*Adversus hereses* III, 21:10).

Blessed Pope Pius IX on the 8th of December 1854 proclaimed the Dogma of the faith revealed by God that the Blessed Virgin Mary "*in the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin*" (Denz.-Schonm, 2083). If the official proclamation of the dogma is relatively recent, the profession of faith by Christians and the liturgy is very ancient in this regard. Furthermore, four years later the same Virgin Mary, appearing in Lourdes to St Bernadette, confirmed the truth of the doctrine by presenting herself with the title 'I am the Immaculate Conception'.

Mary's predestination to this singular grace—consistent with the suspension of the universal decree by which every man, from the moment of his conception is contaminated with original sin—leads us to ponder in the deepest depths the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity's salvific plan. God, One and Triune, had foreseen from the very beginning the future incarnation of the Word culminating in the redemption of human nature that had fallen into sin. He therefore predestined pure Mary, so that He could draw from her uncontaminated humanity, which the Son could adopt in order to re-establish in Himself the original purity of creation and reorientate it to eternal glory.

For this reason, in the second reading of today's liturgy, St Paul reminds us that God wants to see us holy and immaculate before Him. The purity of our origins seemed to be irredeemably lost. However, in Immaculate Mary, God found the perfect

solution to reverse the disaster made from the misuse of our liberty, and returned humanity to the original purity that seemed hopelessly lost.

Mary's Immaculate Conception is a direct consequence of her Divine Maternity. St. Anselm of Aosta wrote: 'Assuredly, it was fitting that the Virgin be beautified with a purity than which a greater cannot be conceived, except for God's. For, toward her, God the Father was so disposed to give His only Son who was naturally one and the same common Son of God the Father and of the Virgin.' (*De conceptu virginali et originali peccato*, XVIII)

This link between the privilege of Divine Maternity and Mary's Immaculate Conception results also in her superiority with respect to us. She is a perfect image of the Church in heaven, the new triumphant Jerusalem, that won't have any marks nor will there be pain and death. This is why today's preface recites: '...she was to be a worthy mother of your Son, your sign of favour to the church at its beginning, and the promise of its perfection as the bride of Christ, radiant in beauty'. Also in heaven Mary is not and will never be only a disciple, but her Son's most exalted. She is and will always be the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, the Queen of the Angels and Saints. Therefore, the preface of the Mass adds: '...You chose her from all creatures to be our advocate with you and our pattern of holiness.'

Mary was Immaculate because she had to be the Mother of God. She, herself has received the original grace of purity and the final state of the blessed life that we also, by collaborating with Divine Grace, hope one day to receive.

Immaculate Mary is full of grace. She is not only Christ's disciple, who with the help of grace has overcome the chains of sin, but she is *totius Trinitatis nobile triclinium*, the noble resting place of the Holy Trinity (St Thomas Aquinas, *Exposito Salutationis Angelicae*, I). The Immaculate, full of grace, will always be Mother and Queen for that elect part of the Church that we hope one day to join, that will one day joyfully sing before the Almighty.

—From the [Dicastery for the Clergy](#)

**Patronage:** United States; barrel makers; cloth makers; cloth workers; coopers; tapestry workers; upholsterers. See [CatholicSaints.info](#) for a long list of locations that claim Our Lady's patronage.

**Symbols and Representation:** crown and monogram; lily; enclosed garden; crown of stars; glass (symbol of purity) lily often placed in a vase of transparent glass; lily of the valley.

# Pope writes to Jon Fosse, Nobel prize-winner in literature



*Pope glad that Fosse's "ability to evoke Almighty God's gifts of grace, peace, and love in our often-darkened world will surely enrich the lives of those who share the pilgrimage of faith."*

**Pope Francis wrote a personal letter to Norwegian playwright and novelist Jon Fosse, the recipient of the 2023 Nobel Prize for Literature. Fosse is a convert to Catholicism.**

**The Holy Father's note was posted on the web site of the Church in Norway.**

**In the October 18 letter, the Pope expresses his appreciation "that your gentle testimony of faith and committed literary voice will now reach a wide-ranging audience."**

**And in particular, "that your ability to evoke Almighty God's gifts of grace, peace, and love in our often darkened world will surely enrich the lives of those who share the pilgrimage of faith."**

**He concludes with the assurance of his prayers and a blessing.**





***Read more:* Jon Fosse, Catholic convert, wins Nobel Prize for Literature**

**The bishop of Oslo, Bernt Eidsvig, spoke of the Pope’s letter as a “great – and well-deserved – honor.”**

**“It shows not only that the [Nobel] prize attracts international attention, but that Fosse’s words reach out across the world, even into the Vatican corridors,” he commented.**

## **Literature-teacher Pope**

**The Pope was once a literature teacher, and his speeches and writings are nearly always sprinkled with quotes from both famous and obscure writers from around the world.**

**Earlier this year, he said that literature was something that helped him understand himself:**

I have loved many poets and writers in my life, among whom I think especially of Dante, Dostoevsky and others still. I must also thank my students of the *Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción* of Santa Fe (Argentina), with whom I shared my reading when I was a young teacher of literature. The words of those authors helped me to understand myself, the world and my people, but also to understand more profoundly the human heart, my personal life of faith, and my pastoral work, even now in my present ministry. Literature is like a thorn in the heart; it moves us to contemplation and sets us on a journey. Poetry is open, it takes you somewhere else.

# The Syrian monastery of Saydnaya: Faith and resilience



*Despite the Syrian civil war, the monastery has stood as a symbol of resilience and faith, still drawing believers both local and from across the Christian world.*

**The monastery of Saydnaya, in southern Syria, is one of the most ancient monasteries in the world. Traditionally held to have been founded by Byzantine emperor Justinian I in 547, the monastery, also known as the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Saydnaya, holds a significant place in Christian history and tradition. It is renowned for its spiritual significance and for a Marian apparition associated with it.**

**Since its foundation, the monastery has weathered the turbulent currents of time, witnessing innumerable historical events and political changes in**

the region. But it has always served as a place of worship, pilgrimage, and refuge for Christians in the Middle East.

One of the most captivating aspects of Saydnaya is a reported Marian apparition.

According to local tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to emperor Justinian I not once, but twice: The first time, to show him the place where he should build the monastery, the second, to give him the blueprints. The exact details of the apparition vary. Some say Justinian was so afraid that his first reaction was to try to kill Mary, but she stopped him and told him to build a church for her “here, on this rock.”

Some others claim that Mary’s presence in the monastery is not due to an apparition, but to an ancient icon preserved in the monastery, the *Shagoura* (meaning “the Illustrious”), allegedly painted by St. Luke himself.

In short, devotees believe that the Virgin Mary’s presence lingers within the monastery, making Saydnaya a destination for pilgrims seeking spiritual guidance – and divine intervention. The monastery’s main chapel is, as expected, covered with ex-votos.

Over the centuries, Saydnaya has faced numerous challenges, including invasions, wars, and political unrest. In fact, it has been heavily damaged since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, which has posed a threat to the monastery, its surrounding areas, and to the community of believers.

The ongoing instability in the region has raised concerns about the preservation of cultural and religious heritage. Efforts to protect sites like Saydnaya are crucial to maintaining the historical and spiritual legacy they represent.

Despite these trials, the monastery has stood as a symbol of resilience and faith, still drawing believers both local and from across the Christian world.

# Why doesn't Jesus just tell us?



*It is the watchful who refuse to give up hope ... He mercifully whispers into our ears to take heed, watch, pray, and look out for his coming.*

**Our Advent begins with Jesus urging us, *Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the Lord is coming.* But why doesn't Jesus just tell us the time of his coming? Why do we have to watch?**

**There are three outstanding benefits for our life of faith that come from watchfulness. In keeping watch we realize that *we are only watchful regarding what we care about.* Watchfulness sorts out for us our priorities. Watching is a way of expressing that we are invested in someone or something ... that we seek deeper union. "If we wish to reach Christ," says St. Caesarius of Arles (+ 543), "let us endeavor to behold heaven with the ever watchful attention of our heart."**

***Being watchful increases our desire.* The more we watch, the more our anticipation for the appearance of the awaited one increases. And as our anticipation grows, so does our appreciation of the one we are on the watch for. St. Cyprian counsels, "May God see our desire, for he will give the rewards of his love more abundantly to those who have longed for him more fervently."**

***And the fruit of watchfulness is overwhelming joy when our loved one appears.* "Every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved" (St. Thomas Aquinas).**

**A great example of watchfulness is at the heart of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic novella *The Little Prince*. The little prince, who is from another planet, travels to earth, and there he meets a fox. But the fox is bored (this is a talking**

fox). He says: "My life is very monotonous. I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored."

So the fox comes up with a novel idea: He asks the little prince to tame him! As the fox explains to the little prince, "But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life."

The little prince at first is hesitant, but then he asks the fox what he must do to tame him. And the fox replies: "You must be very patient. First you will sit down at a little distance from me in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. But you will sit a little closer to me every day."

So the little prince agrees to give it a try, and the next day he comes back. But the fox has a suggestion for him: "It would have been better to come back at the same hour. If, for example, you come at four o'clock in the afternoon, then at three o'clock I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier and happier as the hour advances. At four o'clock, I shall already be worrying and jumping about. I shall show you how happy I am. But if you come at just any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you."

The fox looks forward to being watchful so that he can experience maximum happiness at the advent of the one for whom he longs. Being watchful tames us.

**Watchfulness: the best realism**

It is the watchful who refuse to give up hope, no matter how badly present circumstances may conspire against us. St. John Henry Newman gives us this profound guidance as we set off this Advent:

Jesus contemplated the neglect of him which would spread even among his professed followers; the daring disobedience and the loud words, which would be ventured against him and his Father by many whom he had regenerated: and the coldness, cowardice, and tolerance of error which would be displayed by others, who did not go so far as to speak against him. He foresaw the state of the world and the Church, as we see it this day, when his prolonged absence has made it practically thought that he never will come back in visible presence. And he mercifully whispers into our ears not to trust what we see, not to share in that general unbelief, not be carried away by the world, but to take heed, watch, pray, and look out for his coming.

# Why did Jesus call his mother 'woman'?

Scott Hahn |



“Wedding Feast at Cana,” by Michael Damaskinos, 1530-1593

**“And Jesus said to her, ‘O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come’ ” (John 2:4).**

**Sometimes Jesus says something that seems very odd. This is one of those times.**

**Why would he talk to his mother that way?**

**Well, there are many possible reasons. But the main reason, I believe, is that he wanted to echo other biblical uses of the title “woman” — one from the past and one from the near future.**

**For in just a few years Jesus would again address Mary as “woman.” When he hung dying on the cross, he called her “woman” as he gave her as mother to his beloved disciple, John (John 19:26).**

**But his use of the word also echoes the first book of the Bible. There, “woman” is the name Adam gives to Eve (Genesis 2:23). Jesus, then, is addressing Mary as Eve to the New Adam — which heightens the**

**significance of the wedding feast they're attending, whose historical bride and groom are never named.**

**“Woman” redefines not only Mary’s relationship with Jesus, but also with all believers. When Jesus gave her over to his “beloved disciple,” in effect he gave her to all his beloved disciples of all time. Like Eve, whom Genesis (3:20) calls “mother of all living,” Mary is mother to all who have new life in baptism.**

**At Cana, then, the New Eve radically reversed the fatal decision of the first Eve. It was “woman” who led the old Adam to his first evil act in the garden. It was “woman” who led the New Adam to his first public miracle.**

**The figure of Eve reappears still later in the New Testament, in the Book of Revelation, which is also attributed to John. There, in chapter 12, we encounter “a woman clothed with the sun,” who confronts “the ancient serpent, who is called the devil.” These images hark back to Genesis, where Eve faced the demonic serpent in the Garden of Eden, and where God cursed the serpent, promising to “put enmity” between him and “the woman ... and her seed” (Genesis 3:15). Yet the images of Revelation also evoke the New Eve — who gave birth to a “male child” (v. 5) who would “rule all the nations.” That child could only be Jesus; and so the “woman” in Revelation could only be Jesus’ mother.**

**In Revelation, however, the New Eve prevails over evil, unlike her long-ago “type” in the Garden of Eden.**

**Both the old Eve and the New were created without sin. But only Mary remained sinless and kept God’s commands.**

**The early Church Fathers spoke with one voice of Mary as the New Eve. The Church carried on its reflection on Mary’s sinlessness over almost two millennia before the dogma was promulgated.**

**The medieval poets summed up the matter neatly by pointing out that the Angel Gabriel’s “Ave” (the Latin greeting) reversed the name of Eva. So also did it reverse the rebellious inclination Eve left to her children — and replace it with the readiness to obey, which Mary wants to teach us when she says: “Do whatever he tells you.”**

**Scott Hahn is the founder of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, [stpaulcenter.com](http://stpaulcenter.com).**

**He is the author of “Joy to the World: How Christ's Coming Changed Everything (and Still Does)” (Image, \$24).**

# She inspired Benedict XVI: Vatican remembers Etty Hillesum



*On the 80th anniversary of Etty Hillesum's death in the Auschwitz concentration camp, on approximately November 30, 1943, the Vatican paid her a heartfelt tribute.*

Some 80 years ago, Etty Hillesum died in Auschwitz at the age of 29. She had been born into a Jewish family but had been far from any religious practice. Murdered by the Nazis, she left a legacy of writings that bear witness to her search for a “new language” to speak of God “in the hell of the camps.”

This was emphasized on Wednesday, November 29, by Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, at a seminar dedicated to the young woman organized in Rome under the auspices of the Dutch Embassy to the Holy See. The Portuguese cardinal himself suggested that the Dutch ambassador to the Holy See, Annemieke Ruigrok, celebrate the birthday of the woman he considers a great mystic.



**The 57-year-old prefect, who is close to Pope Francis, is co-author of the 2018 book *In the Footsteps of Etty Hillesum* (Nos Passos de Etty Hillesum), produced with photographer Filipe Condado during a pilgrimage to Amsterdam.**

**Etty Hillesum became world-famous thanks to her diary, which records her spiritual and existential journey. It's the young woman's "spiritual strength" that touches the cardinal personally. Hers is a strength that doesn't suggest "fleeing," but "urges us to stay" despite the horror. It "doesn't allow us to give up, but allows us to keep knocking on the door, in season and out of season," he said during the seminar at the Pontifical Gregorian University.**

### **A "spiritual awakening"**

**Etty underwent a three-year "spiritual awakening" that was also a "solitary" journey. She had to "invent herself," the cardinal emphasized. He believes that she can be inspiring for young people today. On her path, she was inspired by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, but also in great part by the Bible, including passages from the New Testament such as the Sermon on the Mount or St. Paul's Hymn to Charity.**

**This path led her to write some of "the most extraordinary prayers a human being can utter," even as her world was collapsing under the German invasion, the cardinal said. And, continued the prefect, it would also lead this "lover of God" to profess her indelible hope in her last letter, which she signed with these words: "We left for camp singing."**

### **Benedict XVI offered her as an example 10 years ago**

**Many others have been edified by Etty Hillesum's journey. Benedict XVI offered her as an example to the Catholic faithful, and in a very particular context. Two days after announcing his resignation from the throne of Peter, the German pontiff presided over a general audience — his penultimate — at the Vatican. In his catechesis, watched by thousands of Catholics moved by the departure of their pope, he quoted the Dutch Jewish woman. Then he said, "In her disrupted, restless life she found God in the very midst of the great tragedy of the 20th century: the Shoah. This frail and dissatisfied young woman, transfigured by faith, became a woman full of love and inner peace who was able to declare: 'I live in constant intimacy with God.'"**

# PAINTING OF THE MONTH

This month the painting is selected by Marjorie Ward



***Tender is the Heart .... Mort Kunstler***

I chose this painting because when we think of the American Civil War we think in terms of huge battles and armies, but it is also the story of real people caught up in passing events in real time and place. Here we are reminded of the other side of the war and the families left behind. For them life must go on and they have to cope the best way that they can. It especially represents the heart of one of the era's greatest figures, General Robert Edward Lee.

The painting depicts the Baptism of Lucy Lee Hill, the 3rd daughter of General Ambrose Powell Hill and his wife, Catherine Morgan Hill (Forsyth).

The men are in Confederate uniform and the ladies are wearing the crinolines they would normally wear to church, rather than elaborate ballgowns. They are also holding their reticules which would contain a handkerchief and, possibly, smelling salts. Those present are: the baby's parents, A. P. Hill and his wife, Kitty Morgan Hill, Robert Rodes, Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Custis Lee and the Reverend Richard Davis.

The baptism took place on May 1st, 1864 a “clear and warm Sunday” at the Mayhurst in Orange County, Virginia. The Mayhurst was a 3-storey, 20 room mansion, home of the Col. John Willis family, with ample space for Hill and his family to use as their winter quarters. General Lee pitched the tent he used for his headquarters in the front yard. Little Lucy was named after her Godfather, Robert E Lee and Hill’s sister, Lucy Russell.

The Reverend Richard Davis of St. Thomas Episcopal Church performed the ceremony using the silver bowl and goblet which are now in the collection at the church. As he dedicates her life to God by tracing the sign of the cross on her forehead with Holy Water from the silver bowl he is following the tradition started by the early Christian slaves in ancient Rome. Although these slaves were branded by their masters, they declared that they would be slaves to no man but Christ and marked themselves with a cross. This is ironic as one of the issues in the war was slavery.

### *Marjorie Ward*



**Mort Kunstler**

**Mort Künstler, renowned as America’s premier Civil War painter, established his career in the 1950s and ‘60s as a prolific illustrator of popular men’s adventure magazines like *True, Argosy, Stag, For Men Only, Male, Adventure, and Saga.***

**In dramatic images of courage and physical prowess, Künstler captured the post-War bravado of the American male psyche across a broad range of themes: man vs. animal, heists and escapades, military conflicts, and Cold War espionage.**

**The artist’s collaborations with pulp fiction authors included Mario Puzo, for whom he created the original visuals for *The Godfather* saga.**

**Künstler’s larger-than-life role in the golden era of pulp fiction unfolded in more than 80 original illustrations.**

# John Paul I's letter to the author of "A Christmas Carol"



***When he was Cardinal Albino Luciani, the future Pope John Paul I wrote letters to figures from history and literature, including one to Charles Dickens.***

During his brief pontificate, John Paul I was known as “the smiling pope.” His characteristic warmth is evident throughout the collection of letters published as *Illustrissimi (To the Illustrious Ones)*. The letters were written between 1971 and 1975 for the Catholic newspaper *Messaggero di S. Antonio* when he was still known as Cardinal Albino Luciani and served as the Patriarch of Venice.

There were 40 letters in all, written to historical figures like Hippocrates, to saints like Teresa of Avila, and even to fictional characters like Pinocchio. There are also letters to famous authors. In fact, the first letter in the collection is addressed to Charles Dickens, the author of *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*.

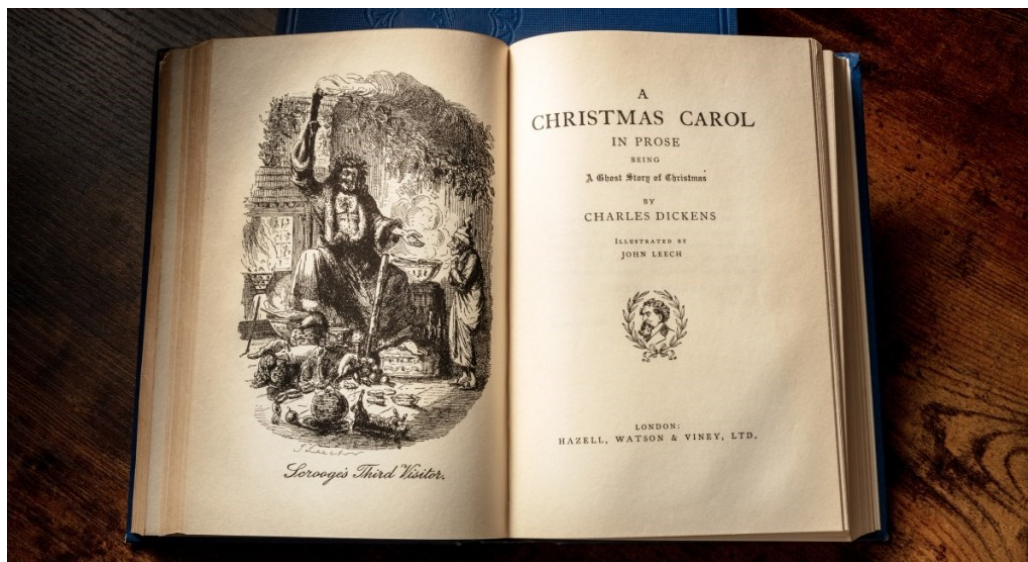
Why Dickens? As he explains at the beginning of the letter, John Paul I had loved Dickens' *Christmas Books* since he was a boy. "I ... enjoyed them immensely," he wrote, "because they are filled with love for the poor and a sense of humanity."

## Dicken's love for the poor

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) knew the plight of the poor firsthand, as the letter points out. When Dickens was just 12, his father was forced to enter a debtors' prison. In order to support his family, young Charles had to work in a blacking factory – which produced bottles of liquid shoe polish. For 10 hours a day, Dickens would seal the pots of paste-blacking and stick labels on them.

The months that Dickens spent in these inhuman conditions made an indelible mark upon him. Many of the scenes and characters in his fiction have their roots in the misery that Dickens witnessed and experienced in Warren's Blacking Warehouse. "This is why all your novels are populated by the poor," the future pope explains. Later he remarks:

**These are the oppressed, and all of your compassion is poured out on them. On the other side are the oppressors, whom you stigmatize, your pen driven by the genius of wrath and irony, capable of shaping typical characters as if in bronze.**



**"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens was published in 1843. This early edition features illustrations by John Leech.**

Plateresca | Shutterstock

## The ghost that fascinated a pope

It is interesting that the character that John Paul I seems most impressed with in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens' most famous yuletide story, is not Ebenezer Scrooge,

but his ex-partner, the ghost of Jacob Marley. He recalls the chilling speech that Marley gives when he explains to Scrooge why he is bound in heavy chains:

**Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business ... Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light could have conducted me!**

## **Christmas is about the forgotten**

John Paul I's letter to Charles Dickens is a wakeup call that there can be no true celebration of Christmas without an active, engaged "love for the poor." Our Lord was born in a manger, and He also said that "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Like Dickens, we are called to respond to the most vulnerable and forgotten in our world.

Though conditions have improved for many since the 1800s, the future pope tells Dickens that poverty still exists in 1971 (the year the letter was composed), though in new forms. Society suffers from dwindling resources, a damaged environment, and a growing "fear and concern" about where the future is headed. That rings just as true 50 years on.

## **A boat on rough seas**

The letter ends with a call to solidarity and trust in God that must have resonated with Pope Francis over the years:

**We are all in the same boat, filled with peoples now brought closer together both in space and in behavior; but the boat is on a very rough sea. If we would avoid grave mishaps, the rule must be this: all for one and one for all. Insist on what unites us and forget what divides us.**

And then John Paul I comes back to the wretched figure of Jacob Marley who "wished that the Star of the Wise Men might illuminate the houses of the poor." Our world, a "poor abode," remains in need of illumination. In this reading of Dickens' classic story, *A Christmas Carol* is not just a holiday ghost story, but also a prophetic call to action and a prayer

# THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN OR WRITTEN WORD

*Something I have listened to, read,  
appreciated and remembered*

This month the featured contribution is by Fr Jim. The concluding chapter of Charles Dickens' classic *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*.

## *SCROOGE'S REDEMPTION*

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

"What's to-day!" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? — Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-er!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you half-a-crown!"



**Sol Eytinge ... the prize turkey**

The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!" whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. "He sha'n't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!"



The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker! – Here's the Turkey! Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

It was a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaister over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile.

He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness" – here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were taken away. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such munifi –"

"Don't say anything, please," retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

"Thank'ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!" He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure.

He had never dreamed that any walk – that anything – could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.



**Edwin Austin Abbey ... It's I. Your Uncle Scrooge!  
I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"**

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I'll show you up-stairs, if you please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn't have done it, on any account.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

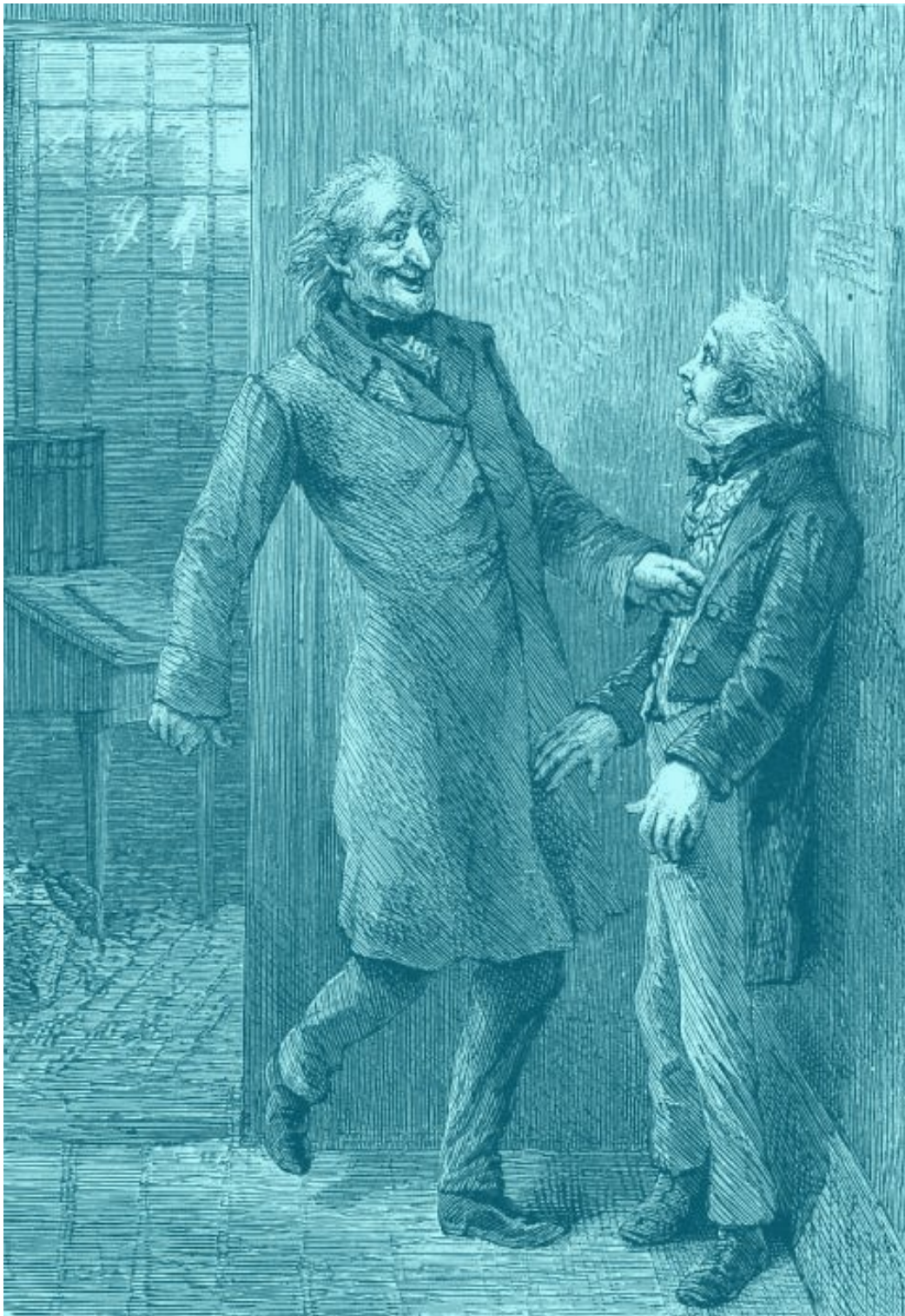
And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."



**Sol Eytinge ... 'I'll raise your salary'**

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again; "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

“A merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. “A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year! I’ll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!”



John Leech ... “A merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge

# ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

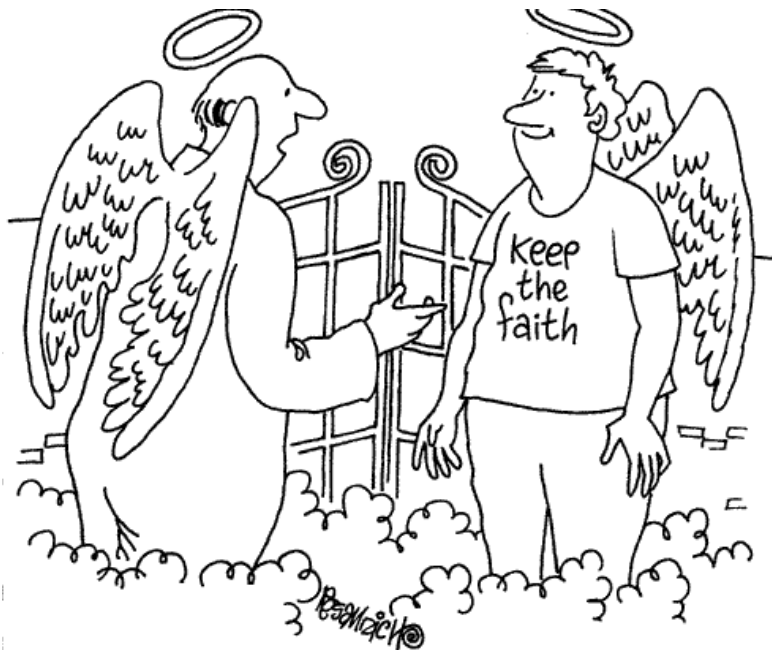
## HOLY HOWLERS

*Typos, misprints, inadvertent double entendre and all manner of infelicitous error published in church notices, bulletins and newsletters*

The subject of next Sunday's sermon will be  
"Paul, on the road to Domestos."

Thirty six books have been donated to the Church Library.  
Please make full use of these

Choir Master, during choir practice:  
"Now choir, when we come to 'The Gates of Hell',  
please pause, so that we can all come in together."



"I really don't think that T-shirt is  
necessary, now that you're up here."