

The Flame

Parish Renewal and the Holy Spirit



November/December 2020

By John Mitchell

In most parishes, it is no longer necessary to arrive at Mass early in order to find a seat. Church attendance is down, especially among millennials. According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website, 24 percent of all adult Catholics attend Mass weekly, with 43 percent attending once a month. Pew Research says that for every convert to Catholicism, six Catholics leave the Church. And a year after completing RCIA and entering the Catholic Church, more than half of new Catholics stop attending Mass regularly.

Despite these statistics, there are reasons for hope. Parish renewal is underway in many parishes across North America and around the world. The challenge of moving a parish culture from being an inwardly focused “maintenance parish” to becoming a “mission-oriented parish” is the focus of a popular book by Fr. James Mallon: *Divine Renovation—Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*. While pastor at St. Benedict Parish in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Fr. Mallon outlined both the problems facing today’s parishes and how to build genuine Christian community in a parish.

Fr. Mallon makes note of **two key insights** of Vatican II: *the universal call to holiness and the universal call to mission*. Both are rooted in our Baptism and are fundamental to the vision of parish life. A parish is healthy to the extent that these calls are recognized and understood by clergy and parishioners. As he explains, “It is not so much that the Church of Christ has a mission, as that the mission of Jesus Christ has a church.”

When preparing for parish renewal, Fr. Mallon notes that many parishes spend a lot of time writing vision and mission statements, and a few years after posting these statements, often nothing much has changed. *In Divine Renovation*, Father Mallon lists ten common values that are found in a healthy parish. Among the most important to parish renewal, he lists: an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, uplifting music, great homilies, the formation of small communities within the parish, and a hospitable culture.

The Need for Leadership

To change the parish culture requires strong leadership. “Cultural transformation is difficult to lead,” Fr. Mallon tells bishops. “It takes time. We need to identify priests with those kinds of gifts and put them in the parishes with the greatest potential and set them up for long-term leadership. Give them time.” He continues, “I believe it takes at least twelve years for transformation.” Common diocesan practice is to rotate priests between parishes. When this occurs too often, parish renewal can be stopped in its tracks.

Fr. Simon Lobo, author of the book *Divine Renovation Apprentice*, began working as Fr. Mallon’s assistant pastor in July 2015. In July 2017, Father Lobo was appointed pastor of St. Benedict Parish when Fr. Mallon moved to the chancery as halftime episcopal vicar and halftime advisor to the Divine Renovation ministry. St. Benedict shows an example of pastoral succession that has allowed parish renewal to continue.

(Continued on Page 6)

Dear Readers of The Flame,

One of the articles of faith we profess in the Creed is the return of Jesus Christ. "...He will come again to judge the living and the dead." This statement sums up a substantial amount of teaching in the New Testament. And from the time that Jesus and the Apostles spoke about His return, it has led to much speculation as to when it will take place.

Though Jesus said, "But of that day or hour, no one knows" (Mark 13:32a), St. John boldly declared, "Children, it is the last hour..." (I John 2:28a). The Sacred Scriptures give us signs that can be witnessed in just about any age of the Church. However, that certainly does not mean that we are to be casual about the return of the Lord. **St. Peter addressed the skeptics of his day:**

Know this first of all, that in the last days scoffers will come to scoff, living according to their own desires and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? From the time when our ancestors fell asleep, everything has remained as it was in the beginning of creation."

(II Peter 3:3-4)

St. Peter then speaks of the Lord's faithfulness and patience:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.

The Mass readings at the end and beginning of the Church year (consummating with Christ the King and beginning with the First Sunday of Advent) **highlight the return of the Lord and our need to be ready for judgement.** These sober words are not to instill fear or idle speculation. They are to propel us out of any spiritual lethargy we may be experiencing and move us to greater holiness and zeal for souls.

I am writing this letter in the third week of October. Coronavirus seems to be surging. Wildfires in California have burned about 4% of State's total acreage. Storms and hurricanes have battered Texas and Louisiana.

Amid these natural disasters, we are on the cusp of a national election. There is great divisiveness in this election and things seem more fragmented than ever in our day. With much of our Judeo-Christian values washed out of our culture, it seems we have less of a starting point to dialogue. Also adding to the problem is that in our day many people have taken their eyes off God and expect the government to solve all their problems.

So what is all this leading to?

Are We Living in Apocalyptic Times? is an article based on a talk by Michael D. O'Brien that he gave at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Ottawa, Canada on September 20, 2005 (found at www.catholicculture.org). He is the author of *Father Elijah* and other popular Catholic fiction works. In this particular talk Michael O'Brien cites some of the most influential Catholic thinkers of the 20th Century: Etienne Gilson, Joseph Pieper and Christopher Dawson. The first two are philosophers. The latter is a historian. All three sensed that the eroding of Christian culture and the ascendancy of science and social science. This combination would lead to a culture in which democracy and

freedom would "be the theme of every broadcast and editorial," but "the underlying substance will be a new kind of totalitarianism, almost impossible to throw off, because it can always cite what appear to be valid arguments is leading to prove that it is not in fact what it is." Seventy years after these Catholic thinkers articulated these similar thoughts, it seems we are getting to that place they spoke of. (Michael O'Brien has also written a non-fiction book entitled *The Apocalypse: Warning, Hope and Consolation* that addresses these issues. I have ordered it. Perhaps I will review it in the future.)

The Church has lived through many harrowing times. And perhaps we at the beginning of some of its most difficult times. **How should we live?**

I am paraphrasing Dr. David Anders from his *Call to Communion* radio program on EWTN radio. He **noted that St. Augustine lived in apocalyptic times.** Rome had been sacked by pagan tribes and culture was imploding. However, St. Augustine did not tell everyone that the world was coming to an end. He instead encouraged people to live their faith fully in hope of the return of the Lord. An internet article on *Eschatology* at www.britannica.com summarized his approach:

According to this Augustinian approach, we must be prepared at all times, but we must not abandon our daily tasks. As both Jewish and Christian anti-apocalyptic lore holds: "If word comes that the Messiah has arrived, go on planting trees."

Faithfulness to the Lord, hope in his coming, love of our brothers and sisters in Christ, doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy: these things we must never abandon.

When our earthly future is uncertain (which, in reality, it always is), let us look to Jesus Christ. St. Paul exhorted Timothy with these words:

This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him;

if we persevere we shall also reign with him.

But if we deny him, he will deny us.

If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

May the Lord be with you and your loved ones as we approach the coming holidays of Thanksgiving and the Nativity of our Lord. Though our world is fraught with difficulties, we have much to be grateful for. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our true and lasting hope, has been born on this earth. Glory to God in the highest!

In Christ,

Fr. Bob Franco

PS: Our next charismatic Mass (with social distancing and masks) will be at St. Peter Parish in North Ridgeville on Friday, January 15 at 7:00 PM.

THE FLAME IS THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CATHOLIC RENEWAL MINISTRIES FOR THE DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND.

FR. ROBERT FRANCO LIASON TO CATHOLIC RENEWAL MINISTRIES.

DENISE CALABRESE, PUBLISHER AND EDITOR.

CATHOLIC RENEWAL MINISTRIES

P.O. BOX 360546

STRONGSVILLE, OHIO 44136

crmweb.org / (440)944-9445

Catholic Renewal Ministries Traveling Charismatic Mass



FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

**Praise & Worship 7:00 p.m.
Liturgy Begins at 7:30 p.m.**

**Fr. Bob Franco
Celebrant**

**Healing Prayers
Following Mass**

**Contact Fr. Bob Franco
440-327-2201
or
CRM at 440-944-9445**

crmweb.org



**SAINT PETER PARISH
35777 Center Ridge Road
North Ridgeville, OH 44039**

Invite a Friend to the Joining of Heaven & Earth!

Catholic Renewal Ministries Events

Our Lady of Angels Prayer Group Rosary

We invite everyone to our "Rosary in the Parking Lot" every Tuesday evening at 7:00 pm (weather permitting) in the parking lot of Our Lady of Angels Primary building (behind Linus Hall). Bring a lawn chair and join in this most beautiful prayer. We have time for intercessory prayer and the Chaplet of Mercy. All are welcome. For questions, contact Don Lawrence 740.424.4707.

The Ss Cosmas and Damian prayer group is meeting every week on Sunday evening at 7 pm at the church. The meeting also streams Live and is then recorded and available for viewing on the Ss. Cosmas and Damian Facebook Page.

Every week, Denny Carleton will be leading worship with a Fr. Michael Stalla teaching. SS. Cosmas & Damian Church is located at 10439 Ravenna Rd., in Twinsburg 44087. For more information, please contact Brenda or Denny Carleton at 216-392-8749.

Join Peter's Shadow Healing Prayer Ministry on Zoom.us on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. To enter the meeting use ID: 848 4900 3670 and Password: behealed.

St. Paschal Baylon Parish will host an evening of "Healing Through the Holy Eucharist" on **Friday, November 6, 2020, at 7:00 p.m.** Fr. Choy Ramos SSS will be the celebrant for the Healing Mass, and there will also be anointing of the sick and Praise & Worship with some extended time in prayer in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Denise Calabrese will lead the worship. A free will offering will be taken to support Manna Ministry, a ministry to support parishioners in need. Masks will be required. St. Pascal Baylon Church is located at 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Highland Heights 44143. For more information visit their website: www.church.saintpaschal.com.

For information on traveling Masses and other events, please refer to the CRM website (crmweb.org). All Masses and events are subject to change due to the coronavirus policies of the State of Ohio and the Diocese of Cleveland. We will try our best to keep the CRM website updated. If you are unsure that a Mass or event will take place, please call the appropriate contact number. Thank you!

St. Paschal Baylon Parish will host an evening of "Healing Through the Holy Eucharist" on **Friday, December 4, 2020, at 7:00 p.m.** Fr. Choy Ramos SSS will be the celebrant for the Healing Mass, and there will also be anointing of the sick and Praise & Worship with some extended time in prayer in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Denise Calabrese will lead the worship. A free will offering will be taken to support Manna Ministry, a ministry to support parishioners in need. Masks will be required. St. Pascal Baylon Church is located at 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Highland Heights 44143. For more information visit their website: www.church.saintpaschal.com.

Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth Chapter of Magnificat, a women's ministry modeled after the Visitation, invites you to a **Breakfast Saturday, December 5, 2020.** The location of the meal will be announced at a later date. For the most updated information, periodically check our website <http://magnificatstark.weebly.com>. Christi Tripodi will be the guest speaker. Join us in a special time of fellowship and sharing.

Cost: \$22 Mail-in / \$23 Online — Go to magnificatstark.weebly.com to print out a Reservation Form or to pay online. Make checks payable to "Magnificat of Stark County" and send with a completed Reservation Form to Sally Kohring, 4205 Cleveland Ave. SW, Canton, OH 44707. Reservations cannot be accepted after November 28th.

Open seating. Doors open at **8:30 am with Breakfast at 9:00 am.** Physical distancing is required and guests are asked not to congregate. Masks are recommended (we will follow the mask protocol of the day).

For further information call Joan Spieth at 330-933-8778.

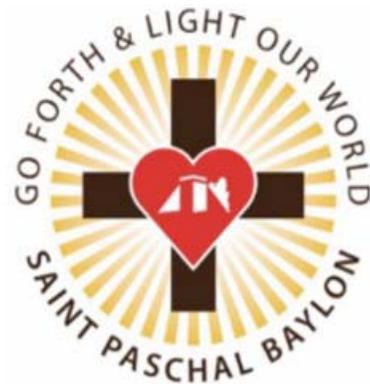
Catholic Renewal Ministries will host a **Charismatic Mass** on **Friday, January 15th, at 7:00 p.m.**, at St. Peter Parish, 35777 Center Ridge Rd., North Ridgeville 44039. Fr. Bob Franco will be the celebrant. Praise and worship will begin at 7:00 and the liturgy will start at 7:30. Socially distant healing prayer will be available after Mass. Masks are required. For more information, please contact Fr. Franco at 440-327-2201 or CRM at 440-944-9445. Come and bring a friend! This will be a time to truly encounter the Lord.



**VISIT US ONLINE:
crmweb.org**



Healing Mass & Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament



Father Choy Ramos SSS
Celebrant

www.church.saintpaschal.com

"Healing Through The Holy Eucharist"

First Friday of the Month at 7 PM

November 6, 2020 | December 4, 2020

**Music, Anointing of the Sick, Praise & Worship
with some extended time in prayer in the
Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.**

**Free Will offering to Support
Manna Ministry - A ministry
to support parishioners in need!**

**Worship Minister,
Denise Calabrese**

Saint Paschal Baylon Parish located at 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Highland Heights, OH 44143

(Continued from Page 1)

Fr. Mallon encourages pastors to form a small (4 or 5 member) leadership team *apart* from the larger parish council. Building this team requires *four non-negotiables*: 1) unity of vision; 2) balance of strengths; 3) healthy trust and conflict; and 4) vulnerability. If a pastoral team is prone to saying, “Yes, Father, of course we will do it your way,” then the team is destined for difficulty. It is essential that the team agree on the *vision* for the parish—included in the ten “common values.” But the strategies to get there must be open to debate. Everyone on the team should allow themselves to feel vulnerable. This means openness to criticism of ideas and being open to changing a viewpoint to bring consensus. And healthy trust will yield fruit from the disagreements that are inevitable in leadership. Leadership is executed in humble deference to the knowledge of God’s will through the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Mallon suggests that the leadership team quietly *reflect on a dream*. “What would you like your parish to look like 10 years from now? 15 years from now?”

The Success of Alpha and Discovering Christ

Dave Nodar founder of the apostolate ChristLife, which developed Discovering Christ for Catholic parishes, says his experience in the Renewal and covenant community led to identifying three dynamics of conversion. First, individuals need to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior and personally respond to the message of salvation. Second, a conversion to the lifestyle of following Jesus, including daily personal prayer and faithfulness to our Baptism are essential. Third, people need to recognize their role in building God’s Kingdom as Jesus asks in his “Great Commission.”

This kind of conversion can happen using tools such as Discovering Christ or Alpha, an ecumenical program that has been used successfully throughout the world. One of the main goals of both is to bring people from inside and outside the parish into an encounter with the risen Lord through the Holy Spirit.

A typical Alpha or Discovering Christ evening includes dinner, a DVD talk, and table discussion on the topic of the evening. The “Holy Spirit weekend” retreat is the pivotal experience in both. Many people who have gone through these seminars have had life-changing conversions that have set them on fire for the Lord.

Alpha and Discovering Christ offer opportunities for hospitality, music, dinner preparation, table discussion hosts and helpers. These activities constantly encourage new leadership which is essential to parish renewal. At St. Benedict, it is this “leadership pipeline” which eventually refreshes leadership across the parish in all ministries.

At St. Benedict, more than 10 “connect groups” consisting of 20 or more people meet twice a month. These communities provide an “evangelization pipeline” which give the opportunity for “*the ask*”—an invitation to “*come and see*”—what the Lord might have for you. If a new Alpha is scheduled, the “ask” might be, “Would you like to meet us for dinner—no charge—next week?” If no Alpha is available at that time, the “ask” might be, “Would you like to join us at my friend’s home for dinner and fun next Tuesday evening?”



The Power of the Holy Spirit

Fr. Lobo has continued using Alpha at St. Benedict with three goals in mind for parish renewal. First is the primacy of evangelization as the parish vision. Second is promoting “best of” leadership principles with the goal of bringing order, structure, and clarity—a truly Catholic approach—to what is happening in the parish. And third (and most important) is recognizing that the power of the Holy Spirit is always what leads to the success of what happens in the parish. Fr. Lobo echoes St. Paul, “I did not come with ‘lofty words or wisdom’ but in ‘the Spirit and power, that your [my] faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God’” (1 Cor 2:1, 4-5).



The Flame

CATHOLIC RENEWAL MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 360546
Strongsville, Ohio 44136

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cleveland, OH
Permit No. 1918

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The FLAME SUBSCRIPTION IS \$5 ANNUALLY

Name:

New Renew

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

SEND CHECKS PAYABLE TO: CATHOLIC RENEWAL MINISTRIES
P.O. BOX 360546, STRONGSVILLE, OH 44136