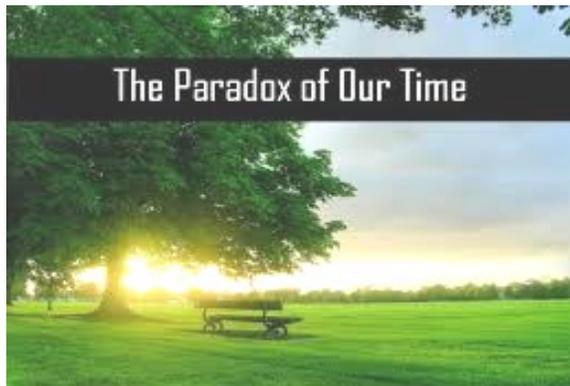


# New Decade – New Priorities

**Editor's Note:** On the Feast of Mary, the Holy Mother of God (January 1), Deacon Jim delivered this homily, designed for us to examine our priorities as we enter a new decade. The beginning is a reflection from a preacher in the 1990's; the second part were Deacon's suggestions we should ponder. A great message as we begin 2020.



The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints.

We spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time;

We have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too seldom, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.

We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor.

We've conquered outer space, but not inner space.

We've done larger things, but not better things.

We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.

We've split the atom, but not our prejudice.

We write more, but learn less.

We plan more, but accomplish less.

We've learned to rush, but not to wait.

We build more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication.

These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow

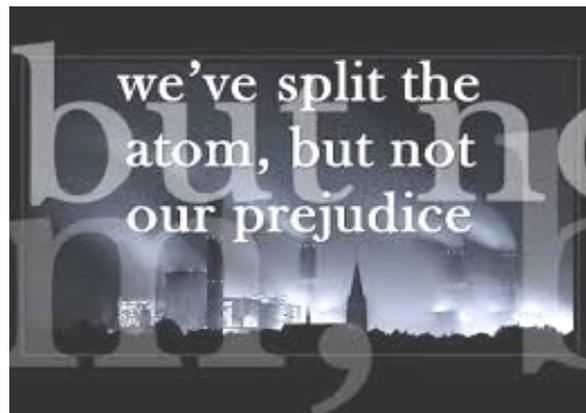
relationships.

These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes.

These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw-away morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer to quiet, to kill.

It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to share this insight, or to just hit delete.



*Remember to spend some time with your loved ones, because they are not going to be around forever.*

*Remember to say a kind word to someone who looks up to you in awe, because that little person soon will grow up and leave your side.*

*Remember to give a warm hug to the one next to you, because that is the only treasure you can give with your heart, and it doesn't cost a cent.*

*Remember to say, "I love you" to your partner and your loved ones, but most of all ! A kiss and an embrace will mend hurt when it comes from deep inside of you.*

*Remember to hold hands and cherish the moment for someday that person will not be there again.*

*Give time to love, give time to speak! And give time to share the precious thoughts in your mind.*

*And always remember, life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by those moments that take our breath away.*

**Deacon Jim**



## Voice of St. Mary's Parish Monthly Newsletter

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# Pontiac Walk for Life Stresses Power of Conversion & Family Support

A group of hearty souls braved some serious wintry weather for the Pontiac Walk for Life on January 11. Close to forty people, organized by members of the IGNITE Youth Group, began with a prayer led by Father Adam. They then formed the



procession from Central School down to the south side of the courthouse. Led by Knights of Columbus 4<sup>th</sup> Degree member Mike Vallow, along with a police escort, the walk members, carrying pro-life

struggling to make ends meet and often had major difficulties keeping her current children satisfied. She worried that, since she was not really able to provide for children properly, what would happen if there was another to care for. She weighed



heavily the thought of abortion, but with the family's prayers, their words of support, and encouragement, she decided to keep the baby. That "baby" is now 30 years old, 6' 4" - happily married with two children. Bennett encouraged the crowd to understand the struggles in making decisions and the importance of support from relatives and friends.

After a closing prayer for Pro-Life intentions, the group convened in the Parish Hall for hot chocolate and cookies, courtesy of the Women's Guild.



signs either homemade or furnished by the Knights, headed down South Main Street towards their destination where IGNITE Adult Leader Sam Alsdorf welcomed them all.

There, Representative Tom Bennett and Father Adam each made remarks in support of the Right to Life. Father's message was one of

conversion, the willingness to choose God's will over our own. He referred to the conversion of Saul to Paul, a man who originally thought he was doing the right thing, but learned that he needed to follow God's agenda, something that happened on the road to Damascus. Besides just wanting to know Jesus, Paul chose then to WIN people for Jesus.

He then shared the story of Abby Johnson, the former head of Planned Parenthood who, according to her own accounts, claimed to have been responsible for 20,000 abortions. Eventually, after years of people praying for her to change, Abby resigned from her post in 2009 and learned God's forgiveness. She is now one of the leading Pro-Life advocates in our country, a true testament to the power of conversion. Father Adam asked that the conversion process remain constant in all our lives, as we seek to complete God's agenda, rather than our own. "Pray for conversion, pray for the power of God. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life," Father concluded.



Next, Representative Bennett declared that the right to Life is one full of emotions. "There is nothing better than when I'm called 'Dad,' or even better, 'Papa.' There's no better feeling than that," Representative Bennett said. He mentioned the beauty of motherhood, holding a baby, feeding him/her, nursing him/her, and caring for him/her, nurturing great support from the audience as he described his feelings. "There is nothing like the sanctity of life. Nothing!" he added.



But Representative Bennett added that the subject of pro-life and pro-choice often cause differences, sometimes within the family circle. He related the story of a relative living far from home, recently divorced, a single-parent with several children already who discovered she was pregnant. Her ex had little to do with her, she was

## 10th Year for *Gonzaga*; IGNITE Making Plans

St. Mary's IGNITE Youth Ministry is busy preparing for the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their Gonzaga retreat, something begun here at St. Mary's by Father David back in 2011 for all high school students.



Gonzaga 10, however, is still looking for a date and a venue due to a scheduling conflict with PTHS for a date that had been originally set. Once that information is released, it should be noted that transportation will be provided, as well as meals and materials for the participants.

## GONZAGA 2020

This will be definitely be a weekend that offers reflection for students; as well as a time to grow in their relationship with Jesus. For Gonzaga 10, the team will be led by Youth Director Maddi Stark. Maddi has been a part of IGNITE throughout her school career and has devoted much of her time to bringing other teens along with her on her journey through our faith. Supporting Maddi is Lindie Alsdorf, who is serving as Adult Director this year. The team is made up of many returning members from past retreats, and they will be combining forces in the next few weeks preparing to share parts of their journey to Christ with other teens in attendance. For the 10-year anniversary of Gonzaga, many of the original team members from Gonzaga 1 have been asked to be a part of the anniversary weekend.

Keep an eye on the bulletin for the latest updates on the Gonzaga 10 dates and location.

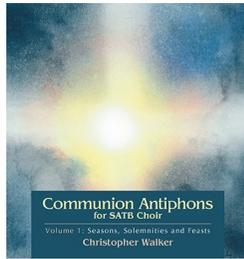
# St. Mary's News & Tidbits



\*\*\*PSA—Due to the cold and flu season which we are experiencing, during the months of January, February, and March, we will NOT offer the Precious Blood during Communion at the 9:30 Sunday Mass. We will resume the Precious Blood distribution on the 1st Sunday of April.

\*\*\*You may have noticed a “new” section in Mass which involves Congregation participation. The

*Communion Antiphon* is proclaimed prior to the distribution of Holy Communion. It can be either said or sung. If the choir is present, the antiphon may be sung or chanted by the choir. Normally, when it is said, the Celebrant will lead the prayer. Just be ready to get involved after Father drinks the Precious Blood from the Chalice. Weekend Communion Antiphons can be found beginning on Page 106 in the Missalette.



\*\*\*Right before Christmas, a lady from our parish who a long time ago served on the Liturgy Committee here at St. Mary's stopped by in the church right before Christmas during a time in which preparations were being made for Masses. She explained that her husband has been ill, and she hadn't had a chance to come to Mass to see the decorations that had been set up for the Nativity of Our Lord. When she saw the lights, the trees, and the layout, she gasped in wonder. The Church lights were then turned off, and she became a bit emotional over the sight. “These are so beautiful,” she declared,



thanking the Liturgy Committee for their hard work in creating such a “meaningful and holy display.” THAT was a Holy Moment!

\*\*\*In honor of the Feast of St. Blaise (February 3), the Blessing of the Throats will take place after all the Masses on the weekend of February 1-2.



\*\*\*SAVE THE DATE! St. Mary's is planning on hosting a Mardi Gras Appreciation Night on *Fat Tuesday*, February 25 for all the VOLUNTEERS in our parish who donate their time, treasure, and, mainly, talents to our parish. More details coming as the date gets closer.

\*\*\*Ash Wednesday is February 26.

\*\*\*SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE—St. Mary's strives to ensure that our youth are able to receive a Catholic education, despite the possible inability to pay. Through the *Invest in Kids Act*, K-12 students have the opportunity to receive Illinois tax credit scholarships to attend private schools. This scholarship opportunity is available to all income-eligible St. Mary's families. These scholarships cover up to 100% of private school tuition and fees and will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. **Applications for the 2020-2021 school year are currently being accepted.** If you have financial need, we encourage you to please take advantage of this scholarship opportunity. Confidentiality is maintained throughout this process. For complete details on income eligibility guidelines or to submit an application, visit the EMPOWER ILLINOIS website. You may also contact the school office for more information.



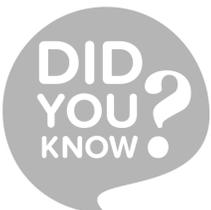
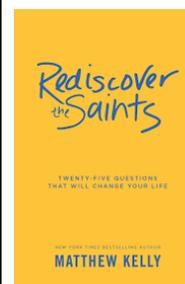
\*\*\*REMEMBER when Father Adam started asking us to pray that we would get 25 new members to our faith and parish last summer? And we all thought he was a bit “crazy?” Reaching a little? Well, from the beginning of August, 2019 through the month of January, we will have had 21 baptisms in our parish. Add to that total our 12 RCIA candidates to join our faith at Easter, along with 2 others who rejoined the church shortly before their deaths, and the number comes to 35 new members! Talk about exceeding expectations!!

And that's just in the last six months! The power of prayer at work in our parish! Wow! Let's keep it up!

\*\*\* Have you noticed the “Bells of St. Mary's” recently? Our bell system for the church, which had been knocked out by lightning during a fall storm, has been restored, and along with it, we have a remote system available. So, besides hearing the bells on the hour, the half-hour, and five minutes before Masses, we will also hear them seven times during every Mass. During the prelude to the Consecration (once) followed by the three rings during the lifting of the Body and Blood of Christ to heaven, our church bells will also ring. People in Pontiac will know that something very special is happening at St. Mary's during those times.



\*\*\* Hope you've had a chance to read *Rediscover the Saints* by Matthew Kelly, St. Mary's Christmas gift to each of us. It is SO different from just reading biographies of various saints. Here, Kelly chooses some familiar saints and some maybe not so familiar to us, not for their lives per se, but the manner in which they lived, focusing on ways we can emulate those same traits in our own lives. Only 118 pages long-but the message and the lessons learned are endless. Copies are still available in church!



... the history behind the Chasuble worn by the priest?

...the principal and most conspicuous Mass vestment, covering all the rest is the Chasuble. Nearly all ecclesiologists are now agreed that liturgical costume was simply an adaptation of the secular attire commonly worn throughout the Roman Empire in the early Christian centuries. The priest in

discharging his sacred functions at the altar was dressed as in civil life, but the custom probably grew up of reserving for this purpose garments that were newer and cleaner than those used in his daily avocations, and out of this gradually developed the conception of a special liturgical attire. In any case the chasuble, in particular, seems to have been identical with the ordinary outer garment of the lower orders. It consisted of a square or circular piece of cloth in the center of which a hole was made; through this the head was passed. With the arms hanging down, this rude garment covered the whole figure. It was like a little house (*casula*).

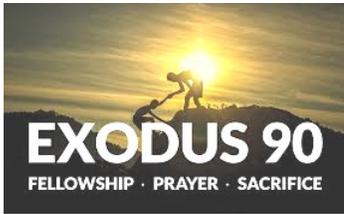


Like the other sacred vestments, the chasuble, before use, requires to be blessed by a priest who has faculties for that purpose. When assumed in vesting for Mass, the act is accompanied with a prayer which speaks of the chasuble as the “yoke of Christ.” But another symbolism is indicated by the form attached to the bestowal of the chasuble in the ordination services: “Receive”, says the bishop, “the priestly vestment, by which is signified charity.”

# ST. MARY'S MEN BEGIN YEAR 2 OF EXODUS 90

Prayer. Asceticism. Fraternity.

Since 2013, the *Exodus 90* program has encouraged Catholic men across the country to return to the fundamentals of the faith. And for the second year in a row, a group of St. Mary's men have accepted that challenge. Thirty men of St. Mary's have begun the annual Lenten exercise which began on January 13 and runs through Easter Sunday, April 12.



During these 90 days the men will experience things like: Cold showers. Daily prayer. Journals. No alcohol, sweets, TV, or movies. Fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. Intense physical workouts. No meat. Prayer groups. Accountability. Bonding. Brotherhood. For 90 days. Three months. All for God.

Sounds crazy? Maybe so. Yet the group, including both Father David and Father Adam, have decided to travel on this path of perseverance, challenge, a bit of suffering and sacrifice, and dependability on God, above all else. As the EXODUS 90 program explains, "Well-documented science tells us that it takes a minimum of 90 days to break addictions and bad habits. The 90 days of Exodus aids men in beginning anew and preparing for a life of greater virtue."

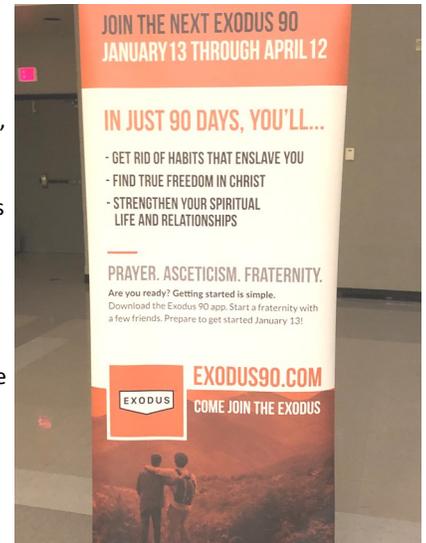
Participants are expected to work out "vigorously" three days a week. They can work out in pairs, in groups, or by themselves. Some have gotten together at 5 AM to work out together, after sometimes having a Holy Hour at 4 AM. Others have done workout videos or resorted to swimming. The hard work from sweating has made the cold shower a little more bearable, especially during the winter weather.

Each day, they are to read a passage from Exodus with a corresponding written meditation, thereby discovering the "personal slavery preventing (the) greater love of God and neighbor." The men also spend time in quiet prayer, whether it be in the aforementioned Holy Hour fashion or just in building on their own individual relationship with God.

The EXODUS 90 program teaches the men to "deny themselves," learning to take up their cross by the cold showers, fasting from all alcohol, between meal snacks, and sweets. Throw in no TV, no movies, no social media other than work-related items, no televised sports. It is here that family members have to be supportive, accepting the challenges the man faces as part of their own.

Father Adam adds that these sacrifices bring something else to the men. "I think it is essential to speak about how taking away internet and unnecessary cell phone usage brings freedom to men," he noted. "They are spending time with wives and children like never before, and not just time, but prayer with wife and family is becoming a standard part of life since there are not any distractions from social media and television. This gives an immense amount of time for the things in life that can be set aside so easily and forgotten, but are the most important."

Another gratifying experience thus far have been the weekly "fraternity meetings." The men have been divided into smaller groups who get together for accountability and encouragement, sharing their feelings about the challenges this program has provided for them, as well as how they seem to be growing in their awareness of God's presence and guidance along the way through prayer. It's turned into a brotherhood, one that will build friendships and an even better relationship with God.



## REFLECTIONS ON EXODUS 90, FROM A WIFE

By Alison Tarr

I know what you might be thinking, "Exodus 90 is for men; why would a woman be writing about it? Did she insanely take part in some of the fasting and sacrifice last year?" Exodus 90 is designed and intended for men, but the beautiful thing is how I witnessed its impact on myself and my family. Other wives (and moms!) have shared with me how the ripple effect extended beyond just the participating men.

When I first learned about the requirements for Exodus 90, I really wondered how this program got buy-in from the male participants. I mean, voluntary cold showers, willingness to exercise multiple times a week, commitment to what I would consider serious fasting, and stripping away extras such as TV, movies, and social media? Some of those things are not hard for me, but I think we can all agree that abiding by the list would be very difficult for 90 days.

And that is why Exodus 90 is rooted in spirituality and fellowship. God knows we can't do difficult things alone. We need to lean in toward God and lean on others in a holy way. Difficult things can be purifying and good for us. Exodus 90 is one of them.

My first Exodus 90 lesson, as an observer, was learning to become support for my husband. When we suffer, we want to be able to suffer with others, right? What's that saying, "Misery loves company?" On days when he missed being able to have his morning cup of coffee, I needed to be there with a fancy glass of ice water and drink one right alongside him. On nights when he just wanted to watch a movie with all of us, I tried to help by thinking of a Plan B so that we could all still have fun and hang out. (Prayer, board games, puzzles, and watching old family videos were part of that.) The easiest thing for me to encourage him on was working out. I enjoy exercise, so I was thrilled to be his cheerleader on that. (He wasn't as thrilled.)

I also witnessed an incredible fraternity among my husband and others in his group. These were men that mostly saw each other at their kids' sporting events and had short conversations, who now were meeting for one to several hours at a time and having meaningful, raw conversations that related their struggles and victories with God's role in their lives. I don't know details, but I saw how important that time together was for those men. Gabe came home from those gatherings a little bit changed—for the good.

Ultimately, what I witnessed was sacrifice. My husband and other men sacrificed for 90 days. Why? Because, if they didn't know it at the start of Exodus 90, they learned and then believed how important their relationship with God is. They saw that leading their own families is ultimately their primary vocation. Their sacrifice was for all the right reasons: for themselves and others dear to them. Wrapped up in all that, the sacrifice was rooted in a developing relationship with God.

As a wife, I was a witness to the waves of support, fraternity, and sacrifice that Exodus 90 created. And that ripple effect went beyond the Exodus 90 men, and beyond me. My children recognized that what Dad was doing was tough. It was manly! And Gabe explained to each of them why he was doing it. I can only imagine the lasting impact Gabe's example will have on them.

Fathers strong in their faith have a lasting impact on families. Statistics show that if dad is the first in the family to become a Christian, there's a 93 percent probability that everyone else in the family will follow his lead. In comparison, if the mom is the first in the family to become a Christian, that number drops to 17 percent.\*

As Gabe and nearly 30 other men from our parish step out on this 90-day Exodus, I am praying for their endurance because I believe the fruits will come with their endurance. Let's support them all with prayer and give thanks for their sacrifice and desire for a relationship with God.

After all, isn't that what we saw Jesus do for each of us?

\*Article: Steve Wood. *Why the New Evangelization Needs a Focus on Fathers.* Online: Dads.org

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# Catholic Schools Week Set for St. Mary's

2020 Theme— *Learn! Serve! Lead! Succeed!*



## Catholic Schools Week Events at St. Mary's:

Saturday, January 25

- 4:00 Mass parts by SMS students

Sunday, January 26

- 7:00 and 9:30 Mass parts by SMS students
- KC Breakfast 7:30-11:30
- **Open House** in the school from 10:30 - noon
- Families create their family shield or crest for their family

Monday, January 27

- **Community Day**
- Send thank you notes to the city council members
- Activity Day in the afternoon for students

Tuesday, January 28

- **Faculty and Staff Day** - casual day (sports team apparel)
- Staff luncheon provided by the Knights of Columbus

Wednesday, January 29

- **Nation Day**
- Prayer service in the morning - 5th grade
- Thank you notes written to Peoria Diocese and to each parent thanking them for allowing them to have a Catholic Education
- Religious activity in the morning for all grades

Thursday, January 30

- **Vocations Day**
- Father Tim Hepner speaks 12:20 - 12:50 (5-8) & 1:00 - 1:30 (K-4)
- Living rosary for the priests and religious life of our diocese at the end of the day 2:00 p.m.
- Dress up like a saint, priest, or nun

Friday, January 31

- **Student Appreciation Day** - Blue/White Casual Dress
- All School Mass - 9:30 a.m. SMS students sit with prayer partner
- Hot Dog Lunch - eat at 10:45 - younger students bring the treat for older ones and older ones bring the drink for the younger ones
- Prayer partners paired up at lunch time and Mass and then pray for them the rest of the year
- Make tie blankets for the Hope Pregnancy Center and local nursing homes with prayer partners
- School dismissed at 1:00 p.m.

Catholic School's Week will be held at St. Mary's School and Parish from January 25-31, and the celebration of the Catholic educational system offered to our students, their families, and the entire parish once again involves everybody. The theme this year is *Learn! Serve! Lead! Succeed!*

SMS Principal Karen Jones is really looking forward to showcasing the benefits of our school. "Catholic Schools Week will be full of activities which reflect our love of Jesus," she explained. "It's the one week in which we both recognize and embrace our Catholic faith. We do this through prayer and other celebratory activities throughout the week. And no better way to show our parish community who we are at St. Mary's than with our annual open house to kick-off the week on Sunday! Our students and teachers should really enjoy what is in store...all the way to the end of the week when, keeping with tradition, we will hold our annual hot dog lunch."

St. Mary's School has always been very proud of its Catholic heritage. For well over 115 years, children in the Pontiac area have received the best Catholic education possible, and the future remains extremely bright. The Open House will be held from 10:30-12:00 on Sunday, January 26. The week is organized by the SMS Student Council under the direction of Mrs. Anne Corrigan.



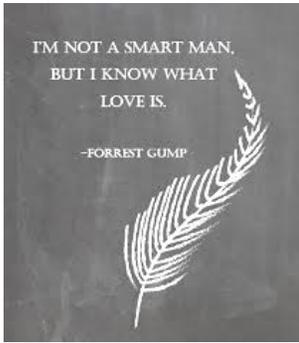
## KC BREAKFAST TO KICK OFF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

The Knights of Columbus will be hosting a Parish-wide Pancake Breakfast to be held in conjunction with the beginning of Catholic Schools Week on Sunday, January 26 from 7:30-11:30 AM in the parish hall. This is a "Free will Offering" event (you decide how much you'd like to pay for the meal), with all the proceeds going to St. Mary's School for projects they see fit. The menu will include Sausage, Pancakes, Scrambled eggs, Biscuits & Gravy, orange juice, coffee, and milk – all you can eat! Get there early and then spend time walking the breakfast off by touring St. Mary's School.



# From The Back Page

by Mick Peterson



I know it's a couple of weeks off, but Valentine's Day is a bit on my mind. Maybe that's because I saw cards, candy, and hearts in a store the day after Christmas. Jeez! Or maybe it's because I saw this quote from one of my heroes, Forrest Gump. Or just maybe it's because we have readings from the First Letter of St. John during morning Masses recently. It's really not Valentine's Day that's on my mind; it's love...one of the most difficult words to define, and an even

tougher word to experience.

Just think of the number of songs that have been written about LOVE; the number of stories that have been written; the movies and TV shows that have used LOVE as their focus. Just think the number of times you have said, "I love you!" to another, or, better yet, someone said that to you---and the goose bumps you felt when you heard it.

Explaining it though? Putting Love into words? Easier said than done. Unless you're Forrest. Or St. John. An article recently in *The Word Among Us* has helped me understand Love through John's point of view. John explains that Love comes from God. Simple as that. It's a gift. God sent His only Son to us to offer us a personal relationship with Him, along with pardoning our sins. A 2 for 1 deal. He uses three words to explain it better – *First. Costly. Free.*

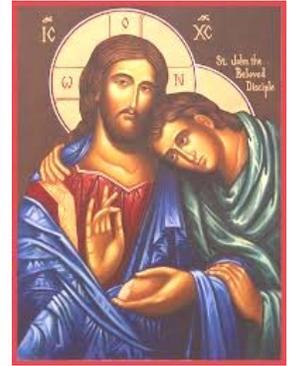
*First*- God's been loving us from the beginning. Yeah, THAT beginning. Long before we came into existence. Long before we knew about Him. Before our Baptism, our Confirmation. Before any decision we have

made to love Him back. And here's the key word- *Unconditionally*. Whatever we decide to do, God will love us. FULLY. FOREVER. It's that simple!

*Costly* – Love has always had a price. It's not just a "feel good" sentiment or reaching out to another. It's giving. It's giving some other person something precious to you. Time, maybe, like helping your younger sibling clean up a mess before Mom and Dad get home. Forgiveness, maybe. Or the hard one for me-patience! It could be so many things, but love, in this case, is "laying down" – or sacrificing – our desires or wants for the good of another or maybe even to lift that person up.

*Free*- Here's the kicker. Love requires us to give WITHOUT expecting or requiring anything in return. The big challenge. It's giving what we have so that somebody else might have it too. Love brings us as much joy giving something away as it brings to the one who receives it. (Think about **that** when buying a gift!) This item or trait of value to us is given freely to another.

As the article stated – *Isn't this what God did when He sent His only Son to live among us?* St. John had first-hand knowledge of what Love is. He had that special relationship with Jesus when He was alive, and John kept spreading the Word long after Jesus ascended into heaven. My guy Forrest understood this as well, and he wasn't very smart, or so they said. Hopefully, as Valentine's Day nears, we can learn ourselves what LOVE is.



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