Grace Notes in Miniature
for Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Dear all:

Here are some thoughts and reflections for this day. Please share with colleagues and feel free to share with students and families if you wish.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle is the Saint of the Day for April 7. He lived from April 30, 1651 – April 7, 1719 and is the Patron Saint of Teachers.

As a young 17th-century Frenchman, John had everything going for him: brains, good looks, noble family background, money, refined upbringing. At the early age of 11, he started preparation for the priesthood and was ordained at 27. He seemed assured then of a life of dignified ease and a high position in the Church.

But God had other plans. During a chance meeting in Rheims, he became interested in the creation of schools for poor boys. Though the work was extremely distasteful to him at first, he became more involved in working with the deprived youths. Once convinced that this was his divinely appointed mission, John threw himself wholeheartedly into the work, left home and family, abandoned his position as canon at Rheims, gave away his fortune, and reduced himself to the level of the poor to whom he devoted his entire life.

The remainder of his life was closely entwined with the community of religious men he founded, the Brothers of the Christian School (also called Christian Brothers or De La Salle Brothers). This community grew rapidly and was successful in educating boys of poor families, using methods designed by John. It prepared teachers in the first training college for teachers and also set up homes and schools for young delinquents of wealthy families. The motivating element in all these endeavors was the desire to become a good Christian.

Yet even in his success, John did not escape experiencing many trials: heart-rending disappointment and defections among his disciples, especially bitter opposition from the secular schoolmasters who resented his new and fruitful methods. Afflicted with asthma and rheumatism in his last years, he died at age 68 on Good Friday, and was canonized in 1900. In 1950, Pope Pius XII named him patron of schoolteachers for his efforts in upgrading school instruction.

Reflection

Complete dedication to one’s calling by God, whatever it may be, is a rare quality. Jesus asks us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30b, emphasis added). Paul gives similar advice: “Whatever you do, do from the heart…” (Colossians 3:23). (Based on https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-john-baptist-de-la-salle/)
You can participate in the prayer of the universal Church by watching Mass from Bishop Barron’s chapel at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWE1Nto5RWI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWE1NtoSMWI).

Today’s Readings from the Lectionary:

The First Reading is Isaiah 49:1-6 – which speaks of Isaiah being called and named before he was born. The passage end with God sending him to be a light to the nations.

Psalm 71: the response is “I will sing of your salvation”, and the psalm includes pleas for safety and deliverance, a pledge of trust in God and a proclamation of God’s wonderful deeds.

The Gospel Reading is from the Gospel of John, (John 13:21-33, 36-38) and tells the story of Jesus identifying Judas at the supper as the one who is going to betray him, at which point leaves to do what he has committed to do. The next conversation is Peter’s statement of loyalty to which Jesus says, “...before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.”

**We have to be familiar** with this passage in able to understand the meaning of the question Jesus asks in our Theological Theme: “Do you love me?”

At our baptism each of us makes promises – or, if we are an infant, have them made for us – to be Jesus’ disciples and to follow him in our lives. In our human weakness, we often slip from this commitment and act in ways which weaken our relationship with God; Jesus shows us that we can always turn back to him and that he will love and trust us. After all, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus and still Jesus trusted him with the leadership of his followers and gave him special tasks to do. (Note that in Latin, the word “discipulus” means student, and implies that the follower has much to learn from the Master).

Your children – or the child in you – may enjoy some of the activities to be found at [https://www.catholicicing.com/ultimate-guide-for-celebrating-holy/](https://www.catholicicing.com/ultimate-guide-for-celebrating-holy/) Although some of the materials are for sale, there are many free printable worksheets and craft ideas.

If you enjoy baking, this is the week to make pretzels or hot cross buns. Although our supermarkets now sell hot cross buns all year round, at one time they were only eaten on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The symbolism is quite clear with the cross marked into every one – it used to be done with a knife cut although some people nowadays will put icing on the buns in the shape of a cross instead. You can find some musings about the meaning, and some recipes at [https://www.thekitchn.com/heres-why-we-eat-hot-cross-buns-at-easter-holiday-traditions-at-the-kitchn-217463](https://www.thekitchn.com/heres-why-we-eat-hot-cross-buns-at-easter-holiday-traditions-at-the-kitchn-217463)

I remember fondly the smell of the spices as the hot cross buns were baking in my grandmother’s kitchen. They would come out of the oven just before we left for the Good Friday Church service and we would come home to enjoy them for tea.
Pretzels also have been associated with Lent and prayer. I found this account at
https://www.oldworld.ws/history-of-german-soft-pretzels.html

Pretzels, or pretiolas as they were first known, had their humble beginnings around 610 A.D. in the region between the south of France and northern Italy. According to historians, the pretzel is the oldest snack food known.

A young monk was preparing unleavened bread for Lent, the Christian period of fasting and penitence before Easter. Using the dough left over from bread making, he accidentally formed the pretzel shape. The shape resembled the way Christians of the day prayed with their arms folded across their chests, each hand on the opposite shoulder, and as this looked like a child’s arms folded in prayer, he used them as treat to reward children for reciting their prayers. It’s said the loops were taught to represent the Christian Trinity of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

The monk named his creation ‘pretiola,’ Latin for ‘little reward.’ From there, the pretiola transformed into the Italian word, brachiola, or "little arms." The treat became popular and spread around the other monasteries over the Alps into Austria and Germany, where it became known as the "Bretzel" or "Pretzel"

**The Religious Significance of the Pretzel**

From its early roots as a reward for reverence, pretzels were regarded as having religious significance for both ingredients and shape and within Catholic countries, it became a part of many religious ceremonies. Pretzels were a convenient way to give food to the poor and became typical alms for the hungry. Those who gave pretzels away were considered particularly blessed. They became such a sacred symbol that they were often packed into coffins.

As time passed, pretzels became associated with both Lent and Easter. The bread culture became highly developed because of meatless holidays, and pretzels, made with a simple recipe using only flour and water, could be eaten during Lent, when Christians were forbidden to eat eggs, lard, or dairy products such as milk and butter.

The Easter egg hunt may very well be a descendant of the tradition the Germans had at Easter, and are particularly associated with Lent, fasting, and prayers before Easter. Pretzels were hidden around the farms for the children to find, just as eggs are hidden today. They were then served with two hard-boiled eggs on Good Friday. The pretzel symbolized everlasting life and the two eggs nestled in each large hole represented Easter’s rebirth. A page in the prayer book used by Catharine of Cleves depicts St. Bartholomew surrounded by pretzels which were thought to bring good luck, prosperity and spiritual wholeness. The Pretzel became an early symbol in marriage, where the wedding phrase “tying the knot” got its start, where a pretzel was used to tie the knot between two prominent families and it was broken like a wishbone at the ceremony.

I am attaching a PDF file from Liturgical Press which may help you to plan your in-home observation of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. LP grants permission for the printing of this resource for use at home. You will find this attached to the email containing this edition of Grace Notes in Miniature.
Also, Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute for Church Life has a number of online courses beginning April 20th. They include

- Breaking Open the Word
- Can We Write a History of Jesus?
- Catholic Prayer
- Christian Doctrine for Catechists III
- Core: Introduction to the Catholic Faith
- Liturgical Music
- Liturgical Theology
• Mary as Mother
• Doctrine of Salvation
• Letters of St. Paul
• Synoptic Gospels
• Theology of the Mass

I believe the links for these courses will work; however, if the link does not work, you can find them at https://mcgrath.nd.edu/online-courses/step/courses/can-we-write-a-history-of-jesus/ etc.

Online courses range between four and eight weeks long, with most being six weeks in length. Students read texts and watch video lessons before posting weekly assignments, sharing reflections in discussion forums and participating in real-time online discussions with classmates.

• Space is limited! The capacity of courses is 20 students
• Register early to guarantee enrollment
• Access to courses begins on the session start date
• View the STEP Comprehensive Calendar of Courses.

Adriana Rerecich, chaplain at STA, and I are just reaching the end of a course from this Institute on a Consistent Life Ethic, which examines how we as Catholic Christians are called to be in support of life from the cradle to the grave, including how we practise our politics. It has been an interesting six weeks during which we, as two of the three non-Americans (the third is from New Zealand) have had the opportunity to share views of our respective countries’ approaches to many issues. The present Covid-19 pandemic has also raised much fruitful discussion about who in our society may considered part of the “throw-away culture”, when we have to develop protocols to respond to the many issues in such a crisis.

Until tomorrow: may...

The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”’ Numbers 6:24-26 NIV

With every blessing,

Gillian