

**CHRISTMAS' HOMEWORK**

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: WHAT TO DO IN 2019?

DUE DATE: December 24, 2019

COURSE TEACHER: GOD

Teaching Assistant: Jesus

*The opening part of January's reflection for the board resembles the typical cover page for a big essay or homework assignment in high school, college or university. Here is why:*



In the light of a new year, I was wondering why, this year more than any year before, I am feeling the darkness of daylight savings time. There have been many nights, I have been so ready for bed, and then looking at the clock and realizing it is only 6:30 pm! Some nights I have had to force myself to stay up until 9:30 pm. I now couple that with the enveloping darkness that is happening as more and more people start shutting off their outdoor Christmas lights. Winter is tightening its grip. The gym is becoming a chore now because I cannot mix it up with a hike or a walk around the neighbourhood. Life seems heavy for some reason. When life starts making me feel like this, I start to pray and reflect more on life, my life, and all that is around me. So, all of this has had me stirring and thinking...

I wonder if Mary and Joseph felt the same way. After the angels were finished singing their joyous songs and once the shepherds headed back to their hillsides to tend to their sheep, it must have seemed eerily quiet. It only made sense that the Wise Men should return to their palaces and sleep in the luxury they had always known. Their people needed their leaders back. The innkeeper needed his livestock to return to a normal routine. The great nova star in the sky naturally would go dim. People can only 'ooo' and 'awe' over a baby before they have to go back and feed their own kids at home.

They the young, newlywed couple, were now, with donkey in tow, making the journey back to their hometown. They weren't just bringing their baby home...it was the Son of God. They had no idea what their future was bringing them. They had no idea the violence their child would go through one day. They had no idea how kings would and had turned against him. His light would bring them darkness too.

I am feeling in touch with Mary and Joseph lately. I watch the news and see Presidents throw people and the truth into chaos of darkness. I have seen movies lately where your worst fears are kept out only by blindfolding yourself and therefore stumbling and falling down every moment of your life! Violence is on the rise. Racism is on the rampant. Isolation is growing. I do not want to subscribe to this kind of life. I am sure God does not want me to live that kind of life either.

Maybe there is something greater than Christmas and the birth of the Christ Child. I know that might seem horrible, even blasphemous to some, but hang with me here! Maybe we celebrate the coming of God's only Son so we can carry His HOPEFUL and LIGHT-FILLED message throughout the whole year.

How do we do that? Well, there are people who are broken that we know. The Homework of Christmas would tell us to hold those people and help them mend their broken parts. There are people who feel lost. The Homework of Christmas would say help them find their way. The food bank could always use not only donations of food, but maybe donations of your time. Helping to feed and to support the hungry, well, that for sure would be a high Level Three grading! There are people we haven't forgiven in our lives. We carry grudges or maybe they do! Either way, we are all prisoners of pride and frustration. The Homework of Christmas would challenge us to forgive and yes, even pray, for those who have hurt us the most. I could see a Level Four coming out of that! Do we all want a world of Level Four +++ - then we need to bring peace to our hearts, our families, our work places, and our neighbourhoods. We should rid the darkness of racism and judgement with the power of God's LIGHT and LOVE. If we want the music of the angels to return like that night over that little manger, then we need to let our hearts sing of the glory of God's endless blessings we have in our lives.

We will never master the darkness. We will never be the master teacher. We will never come close to the love of that baby for us. What we can do is continue the HOMEWORK of CHRISTMAS throughout all of 2019.

God bless us all in 2019.

*By Chaplain Wayne Lachapelle – Notre Dame CSS*

*“Do you love me?”*

*The Lord wants to have a relationship with each and every one of us. At its foundation, our connection to Jesus Christ is one of love.*

A common phrase used by many individuals is “I am not religious but rather spiritual.” I have realized that over time, for most people, it is a quick way to explain that they don’t attend Mass very often, but they do think of God. But there is a movement, a kind of spiritual movement of spirituality that is separated from the faith community and it is people who follow a guru. They search out ways to find meaning in their lives, meaning for the things happening around them and they do that by following the teachings of people they consider to be wise. This present-day movement of spirituality is nothing new. It is not something that has come upon us in the last little while; it has always been with us because people have always wondered about the mystery of who they are: the mystery of life, the mystery of the world and the answers, yet many are looking in all the wrong places. God is able to work through that and often people are led to the true faith, sometimes through many directions. Even the magi searched the stars, yet this questioning in their hearts and minds was not enough. It was only when they encountered the revelation of God, that they found the direction they should take. Their encounter with the infant messiah so changed their lives that they went home by a different road, no longer seeking the guidance of stars but instead encountered the true and living God and they now they had meaning in their lives. This is also true for us. At Mass, we encounter God through the Word of God that is proclaimed in the Eucharist that we share. We encounter the living Lord, who is light from light, God from God, a light for all nations and people. The true God desires to call us to Himself, in a relationship with Him, because our spiritual life is not about seeking meaning, seeking out God, **but our spiritual life at its core is being found by God because it is God who seeks us.** It is not us that seek God but rather, like the Shepherd who looks for the lost sheep, it is God who seeks us. This profound relationship brings us unquenchable life and gives our lives new purpose and meaning.

Jesus Christ alone, is the answer to every question that fills the human heart; He who brings us light and leads us to the Father. This is true love.

*“Faith is above all a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, and to experience his closeness, his friendship, his **love**; only in this way does one learn to know him ever more, and **to love and follow him ever more.** May this happen to each one of us.”*

*Pope Benedict XVI*



By Kandy Harkin, School Chaplaincy Leader, St. Ignatius of Loyola CSS

"Tell me somethin', girl...  
Are you happy in this modern world?  
Or do you need more?  
Is there somethin' else you're searchin' for?"

*-Lyrics from 'Shallow', A Star is Born*

Searching. I think that one word sums up not only our Lenten and Easter journey, but also continues through our entire life's faith journey. We are constantly searching for more in this 'modern world', more than it can provide for us. We are in a constant search of God in the struggles of Lent and the joy of the resurrection.

As a community we search. Searching for the way to live. As we grow, so does our determination to carry out a mission. Jean Vanier himself set forth a mission to 'accept, include and serve with love'.

***Searching for acceptance...***

***Searching for inclusion....***

***Searching for love through service...***

Jean Vanier provides us with an example of service, inclusion and acceptance where we find God in this 'modern world'. Love is an action.

***"Every human activity can be put at the service of the divine and of love. We should all exercise our gift to build community."*** Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*

**You** are the 'star that is born' through finding God in your searching.

And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them" And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." *Genesis 15:5*

*By Brian Dunn, School Chaplaincy Leader, Jean Vanier CSS*



## DROP THE BLANKET!

I **LOVE** (in all capital bolded letters on purpose) the Charlie Brown Christmas special.

In its simplicity and honesty, it drives home the true meaning of Christmas. When the first piano notes are hit at the beginning, you know it's not going to be your typical Christmas special. In less than one hour the special has a very communicative dog, Beethoven music, a counselling session, imitation trees long before there were imitation trees, and a Christmas pageant we never get to see!

After all the commentary on Christmas being too commercial is finished and Charlie Brown is exhausted by the pressures of Christmas, he yells out, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" Linus immediately jumps in and says, "Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about!" He then moves to the centre of the stage and ask for "Lights Please!" He then recites the passage from the Gospel of Luke, and halfway through something happens that a lot of people miss!



***"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night, and lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone 'round about them and they were so afraid, and the Angels said unto them, 'Fear not!'"*** And then it happens!!!! **Linus drops his blanket.** NEVER before and NEVER again will we see in print or in motion cartoon form, Linus let go of his trusty blanket...his security blanket. The exact moment after he lets go of his blanket, he was then able to throw his hands in the air! To me that speaks louder than any other sentiment in this classic cartoon. My name isn't

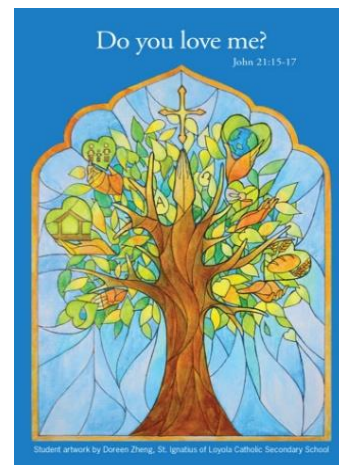
Linus and I don't carry a blanket, but I am certainly insecure about things and I am guessing there are a lot of people just like me. I know some of us hang onto things we should 'let go and let God'. We can carry the loss of friends and family members to sickness and death. Some of us have mourned the distance between ourselves and our friends and or family members. Some of us have carried on relationships long past their expiry date! I can assure you that my pride and my foolishness have made me think I can control everything in my life. My name isn't Linus but I guess I do carry a secret blanket people cannot see...maybe you do too.

By throwing his hands up heavenward and thus totally believing the "FEAR NOT", Linus teaches all of us to just trust in a plan bigger than what we think we know! In essence, this is the journey and challenge of Advent. We are called to not only prepare our hearts, but to perhaps give our hearts to the Lord. Once and only once we have given our total selves to God will we suddenly live a worry-free and anxious-free life.

So this Advent, as the candles are lit, as the darkness comes earlier and earlier, as the malls fill up and our wallets get thinner, we are called to not buy into all the materialism of Christmas. We are called to DROP THE BLANKET, our blanket, and to "FEAR NOT, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy that belong to all people!"

May all of you have a blessed and a merry Christmas. May the birth of the Christ Child bring you and your families and friends nothing but joy and hope.

By Wayne Lachapelle School Chaplaincy Leader, Notre Dame CSS





We come to the end of the school year and we may find ourselves a little worse for the wear. Our baptismal call to continue in Christ's footsteps can find us a little depleted. To love as Christ loves can be demanding on our time and energy. Thankfully, we are able to be in an intimate relationship with Him, for how else could we do what we do in our schools? We are in a privileged position in the education system: we walk with our students and their families and witness to all the different circumstances they are facing and attempting to overcome. Our students and their families look to us for guidance and leadership to help them in all the ways we can. Sometimes, we are sharing in their joy, and sometimes we are helping carry their despair, their grief, their anxiety over things beyond their control and ours. Considering our theological theme, to love as Jesus loves is no light or easy task. To love others the way Jesus loves demands that we have an internal strength to be with others, experiencing the many emotions and reactions they are going through and remaining calm with a faith-filled peace that Christ has promised to be ours and which we share with them.



I remember when I was a child coming home from school and having my grandmother greet me at the door. She lived with us since before I was born so in a way, she was another parent loving me through my childhood. On rainy, cold days she would be waiting for me at the door and on the stove would be warm, homemade applesauce which I would gladly eat to warm myself up. She anticipated that I would be cold and would need something warm to take the chill out from the inside. When Jesus asks us if love Him, He is asking us to anticipate others' needs and show them the same hospitality He showed to others in His earthly life, regardless of who they were or from whence they came. To love Jesus is to love others plain and simple. Yet, to answer His question puts us on the spot. Sometimes we do not want to love others because we know what it demands of us. Yet, for those of us working in the education system, we keep going; the path is made by walking, as an African proverb says. Loving in this way for ten months for other peoples' children and their families can take its toll on us. In this season of June, when we are cleaning our classrooms, decluttering our offices and our filing cabinets, let us also declutter our hearts from the effects of caring for others. Let us place all this excess worry and stress into God's "in" box and embrace the pace of the next two months where we can go to the door where Jesus is waiting for us to fuel us with His warmth and goodness so we can start this all over again in September. Perhaps Jesus is waiting for us in our family members who are wanting to be with us. Perhaps Jesus is waiting for us in the quiet of the day, wanting to be alone with us and speaking to us in the sounds of nature that surround us.

In whatever way Jesus is waiting for you, allow yourself to be welcomed and nurtured by Him so you can continue to grow deeper in your relationship with the One who has called you and loves you into being.

*By Adriana Rerecich, School Chaplaincy Leader, St. Thomas Aquinas CSS*

*"Do you know me?"*

It is so easy to profess love for something when it's abstract, softly blurred by distance and pleasantly vague. We can wax poetic about our love of adventure, love of nature or love of humanity. When people and things come into sharp focus it becomes more challenging. True love is personal and specific and is expressed through decisions, a willingness to sacrifice and to become vulnerable. True love starts with knowing the other. Do we know Jesus? Do we know those around us? Do we truly know ourselves?



During Lent we are called to increased prayer, self-reflection and spiritual growth. Through prayer, spiritual reading and reflection on scripture we come to know Jesus better. We can imaginatively place ourselves within the gospel stories and experience ourselves sitting at Jesus' feet. We can hear his words as if spoken personally to us. Opening space within ourselves to hear God's voice through times of stillness can help us experience our God who is as close to us as our breath. Reading spiritual books can challenge, clarify and affirm us in our path.

Self-reflection often flows naturally from these times of prayer. We begin to see our patterns, our fears and resistances, our gifts and strengths. A wonderful way to grow is to reflect on the day's events in light of our faith. We can ask ourselves questions about difficult interactions, like, "What was happening with me when I responded in that manner?" "What was I feeling?" "How could I respond differently in the future?" In this way we are learning about ourselves, knowing ourselves on a deeper level. You can even start writing a User's Manual for yourself, to prevent yourself from falling into the same patterns. My User Manual states, "Do not take yourself seriously when you are tired. Just go to bed."

Equipped with stronger self-knowledge we come to understand which people and situations set us off. We realize that our judgement is as much about ourselves as about the other. Releasing this judgement is like taking a filter off a camera. We have a new perspective. We can choose to see the other with curiosity and acceptance. I have been surprised to discover within an adversary, not malice, but simple, human hurt and vulnerability. Seeing this woundedness, compassion replaces bitterness. I've met some of the dearest people in my life this way.

These actions - praying, reflecting, forgiving and seeking forgiveness - form the life-long pattern of turning, ever more deeply, to God. Though challenging, our Lenten practice prepares us for the joy of Easter and the promise of the Resurrection. In time, may we learn to live all seasons as an Easter People.

*By Mary Lozowsky, School Chaplaincy Leader, Christ the King CSS*

## Do you love me?

I'll be honest, I don't know about many of you, but more often than not, when I hear and see the heading of our theological theme, in my mind it is meant to be sung, just like the Contours sang it. With intensity, with deep longing.

We know that it is Jesus who asks this question, so the song is not as though Jesus is desperate or that He is lacking something, but the way I see it is that He is calling us to love in that intensity, with our whole being as deeply as He loves us; as a priority before all other priorities, as He prioritizes us above all; as though love is the only thing we need to live a meaningful and fulfilling life and nothing can replace it. As He persevered in Love, even when there was agony and torment, injustice, corruption, He never ceased to Love. Love to the nth degree.

If we set that theme as a priority, as a core value in all we do, in our attitude, it will bring us to learn and discover that Love is the real motivator in life. That justice, service, education, leadership, forgiveness, formation, humility, meekness, hospitality, understanding, care, peace, equity, gratitude, presence, etc. starts to make more sense when we decide to live by Love first.

Imagine, if all the decisions we made were made out of Love, if our daily chores, duties, responsibilities, work were executed with Love, if our struggles, challenges, suffering, fears, conflicts were filtered through Love, if our expectations, our longing, our wants were first to Love, and if our prayer was to deepen our Love and to comprehend Love and to bask in Love... what a different world this would be. This is precisely the life Jesus invites us to in this question. The answer is up to each one of us.



*By Fr. Andrij Figol, School Chaplaincy Leader, Corpus Christi CSS*



"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' (John 21.15)

As I look out the back-garden window, everything looks dead. The fall colours have lost their luster. And as I gaze out the front window of my house, I see that the enormous maple has lost most of its leaves. Summer has left us and another Canadian winter looms.

From the church hymn, 'Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise', Walter C. Smith wrote in its third verse, 'We blossom, then wither as leaves on a tree, but you live forever, who are and will be.' As our gardens move toward death, so do we. As the fall season takes away our summer, we prepare for the winter temperatures and the first onslaught of snow. We love Jesus in our blossoming and in our fading. He lives forever and as we live for him in this life, we will live with him forever in the next.

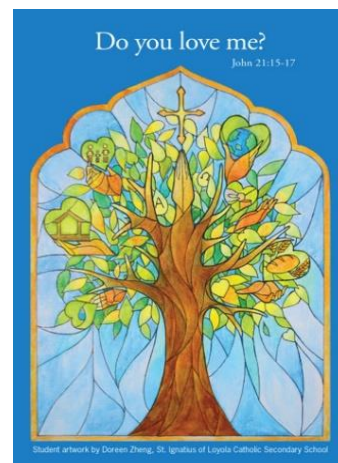
I write this reflection on the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day). More intensely than any other day of the year, I think about my loved ones and friends who have gone before me. I will pray for them regularly this month. Loving memories flood back of the times spent with my mother, my Grandparents and other relatives who have died. I remember days spent with friends and acquaintances like Jim, Janine, Nancy and Jerry. So many of them have gone before me.

This is one way that I can respond to our Lord's question to St. Peter and to me: by praying for the dead. Yes, Lord, I love you and I love all those you have put into my life. Many are still alive, and some have died. I have tried to love them as best as I can. We pray for the living and the dead.

Some of our loved ones and friends don't need our prayers; they've already reached the Promised Land. And others are still journeying in the state we name as Purgatory; we continue to pray for these holy souls.

When I used to ride to Assumption School, one eerie but beautiful memory was going through Holy Sepulcher Cemetery the day after All Souls Day. In the early morning darkness, the whole cemetery was lit up with candles at many of the graves. It was as if the whole place was waiting for something. Electric lights flickered and shone as far as I could see. Just like the holy souls waiting to behold the beatific vision, I thought.

When we pray for our dearly departed loved ones, we are responding affirmatively, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." We are feeding his lambs, our brothers and sisters in Christ who have gone before us.



*By Lorenzo Campanelli, School Chaplaincy Leader, Bishop P.F. Reding CSS*

As I headed home to start preparing for the celebration of Thanksgiving with my family after Faith Day (a celebration with my Board family) I was reflecting on some of the conversations we had held that day.

Our focus as the CEC was on “Promise” and involved personal examination of what many promises mean to us. We looked at the Baptismal and Confirmation promises we reaffirm at various times in the Church year, other promises we make in Marriage, Citizenship, military or police service, the simple promises of joining a youth movement such as the Scouts or Girl Guides. We then looked at the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter, “Renewing the Promise”, and what that calls forth from us as partners in Catholic Education.



October is a time rich with images of promise: the brilliant colours we observe are a reminder of how much beauty God offers us and the promise of Creation. Certainly, another part of the ‘promise’ is that winter isn’t far behind; however, how can one not be stirred by the “line of smoky hills” and “crimson forest”<sup>i</sup> on a sunny morning in October. I found myself singing the hymn, “How Great Thou Art” at the top of my lungs with all the car windows open and felt a great sense of gratitude to God for filling my vision with such beauty.

That called to mind another woman, a model to all of us, who sang to God in gratitude for His call to her: Mary, Jesus’ Blessed Mother, whose feast day we celebrate on October 7<sup>th</sup> as Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Mary understood the meaning of promise as she accepted God’s plan for her to carry His Son and give Him birth. Through the centuries, Mary has appeared to people to renew her promise to mother the Body of Christ and to intercede for us.

Traditionally, October was highlighted as the month of the Rosary; however, this beautiful prayer can be offered at any time of year to remind us of all of the promises we enjoy; as we meditate on the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious and Luminous Mysteries, we enter into relationship with Our Mother who promises to accompany us on our life journey, to fill us with hope and help us to be joyful disciples of her Son.

October ends with the Eve of the Feast of All Saints (All Hallows’ Eve or Hallowe’en). May this be for us not just a secular opportunity to dress up, eat too much candy and party hearty, but a time for us to reflect on the many saints who have heard God’s promise and made their own to follow Him.

*By Gillian Federico, System Chaplain and Faith Formation Lead*

<sup>i</sup> “Indian Summer” by William Wilfred Campbell

“Caregiving as a calling or privilege is not rooted in tasks but in connection between human beings.” - Henri Nouwen

If education was simply about passing on information, it would be much simpler. But, of course, education is so much more. We teach students, not subjects. We give so much of ourselves to our students and colleagues; building relationships, supporting and encouraging others in good times and in bad. Sometimes we may feel our job would be easier if we didn't care quite so much. For most of us, this is just not possible. We care for our students. We care for our colleagues. We have families and people in our personal lives that we care for. We do this because of our passion for education and our faith. All of this caregiving, while important, life giving and life changing, can be draining. Caregiver fatigue is real!

The first 2 months of school can be so hectic and busy that we neglect ourselves: physically but also emotionally and spiritually. We can begin to feel overwhelmed and burdened. We are blessed to be in Catholic schools where we can turn to our God individually but also communally. Our faith reminds us that we love others because God loves us first. We have a God who loves us, is always there with us, and who we can turn to in times of distress.

I want to share this prayer with you, one I turn to when I feel alone and overwhelmed. It has given me solace and hope. I pray it does the same for you.

I am leaning on the heart of God.  
I am resting there in silence.  
All the turmoil that exhausts me  
is brought to bear on this great love.

No resistance or complaint is heard  
as I lean upon God's welcome.  
There is gladness for my coming.  
There is comfort for my pain.

I lean, and lean, and lean  
upon this heart that hurts with me.  
Strength lifts the weight of my distress.  
Courage wraps around my troubles.

No miracle of instant recovery.  
No taking away of life's burdens.  
Yet, there is solace for my soul,  
and refuge for my exiled tears.

It is enough for me to know  
the heart of God is with me,  
full of mercy and compassion,  
tending to the wounds I bear.

-Joyce Rupp



By Marie O'Connell, School Chaplaincy Leader, Holy Trinity CSS