

# HOLY REDEEMER



# GRACE NOTES

September 2023

## September Newsletter - 2023

### Introduction...

The rich history of the Catholic Church can make it easy to overlook many important dates. The month of September is no exception, and among the key events this month are The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8), The Most Holy Name of Mary (September 12), Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15), and the Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (September 29). One of the important dates that has perhaps drifted from our collective consciousness, and yet has a particularly interesting story associated with it, is The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which is celebrated on September 14.

After Jesus' death the cross upon which he was crucified was buried so that the early Christians would not be able to venerate it. In the years that followed, a pagan shrine was built upon the site where the cross was buried to honor of the goddess Venus. The construction most likely occurred between 117 and 138 A.D. during the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

Roughly two centuries later a woman named Helena, who was a devout Christian and also the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to locate where the important events in the life of Jesus Christ occurred and to preserve relics of the Christian faith that remained there. One of her most important goals was to find the place of Jesus' crucifixion and the very cross on which He had hung.

By interviewing many locals, and with the assistance of Macarius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, Helena discovered the spot where Jesus was crucified. She also found the True Cross which had been buried. Actually, Helena and her followers found *three* crosses, and were uncertain as to which of them was the True Cross. According to legend, Macarius had the crosses carried to the bedside of a woman who was at the point of death, where he proclaimed, "Let this woman who is now expiring return from death's door as soon as she is touched by the wood of salvation." When the woman touched the first two crosses nothing happened, but when she touched the third cross – the True Cross – she was revived.



Helena then had a church built on the original site of Jesus' crucifixion to house the True Cross -- known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher -- which was dedicated by her son Constantine in 335 A.D. Even today, the Stations of the Cross in Jerusalem — the "Via Dolorosa" — end at the church she built.

The True Cross remained in the Church until 614 A.D. when it was taken by Chosroes II, King of the Persians, after the Persian invasion of Syria and Palestine. In 629 A.D., the Cross was recovered and brought back to Jerusalem by Emperor Heraclius of Constantinople and restored to its place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Tradition has it that Heraclius carried the cross on his back, a public act of homage, in order to restore it to its rightful place. However, tradition also has it that he was unable to move the cross until he had removed his royal clothing and put on the humble garments of penance instead.



The date the True Cross was brought back to Jerusalem was September 14<sup>th</sup>, which ironically was the same date when the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was dedicated.

### **On the Shoulders of Giants – The Apostle Bartholomew**

*Isaac Newton said that all he had accomplished in life was due to “standing on the shoulders of the giants” who came before him. Each month we will remember one of the giants upon whose shoulders the parishioners of Holy Redeemer are perched.*

*For the past several months Grace Notes has been focusing on the Apostles and individually illuminating each of their life stories. This month it’s Bartholomew. (Confusion alert: Bartholomew is sometimes referred to as “Nathanael.”)*

Let’s first dispense with the naming issue. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as in Acts, Bartholomew is identified as one of the twelve apostles. In the Gospel of John, however, there is no mention of Bartholomew, with the name *Nathanael* taking its place. For this piece, we’re going to refer to Bartholomew/Nathanael as simply “Bartholomew.”

Bartholomew was brought to Jesus by his friend Philip and was the sixth and last of the apostles to be chosen by Jesus himself. He had been associated in several business enterprises with his soon-to-be fellow apostle Philip and, with him, was on the way to see John the Baptist when they encountered Jesus.

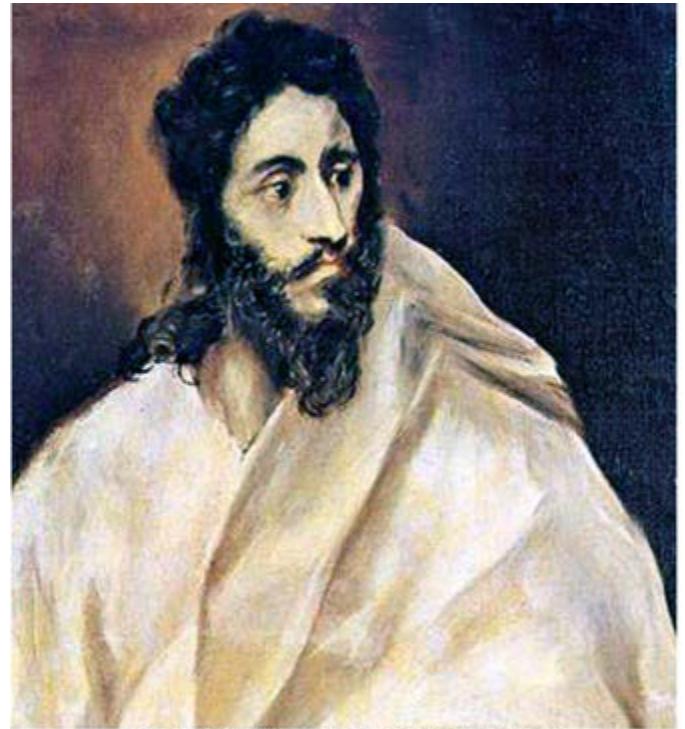


When Bartholomew joined the apostles, he was twenty-five years old and was the next to the youngest of the group. He was also unmarried, and the only support of aged and infirm parents, with whom he lived at Cana. Bartholomew was also one of two best educated apostles (the other being Judas Iscariot), and he had originally considered becoming a merchant.

Bartholomew's greatest virtues were his honesty and his sincerity. The other apostles said that he was "without guile," and Jesus himself described him as "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47). Bartholomew's greatest weakness was his pride. He was very proud of his family, his city, his reputation, and his nation, to the point where he was inclined to prejudge individuals in accordance with his personal opinions. Before meeting Jesus he was dismissive, stating "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). While proud, Bartholomew was not obstinate, and he was quick to reverse himself once he looked into Jesus' face.

Many times when Jesus was away and things were becoming tense and tangled among the apostles -- when even Andrew was in doubt about what to say to his disconsolate brethren - Bartholomew would relieve the tension by a bit of philosophy or a flash of humor. Consequently, the apostles all loved and respected Bartholomew, and he got along with them splendidly.

The one exception of Judas, who did not think Bartholomew took his apostleship seriously enough and once secretly went to Jesus and lodge a complaint against him. Said Jesus: "Judas, watch carefully your steps; do not overmagnify your office. Who of us is competent to judge his brother? It is not the Father's will that his children should partake only of the serious things of life. Let me repeat: I have come that my brethren in the flesh may have joy, gladness, and life more abundantly. Go then, Judas, and do well that which has been entrusted to you but leave Nathaniel, your brother, to give account of himself to God."



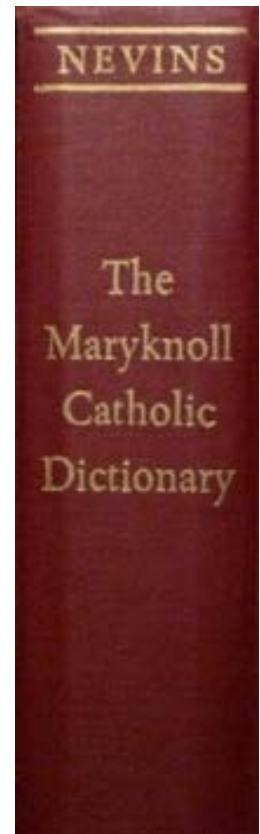
Bartholomew /Nathaniel (detail) by El Greco

Bartholomew's father died shortly after Pentecost, freeing Bartholomew to travel to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom and baptizing believers. He later went on to preach in Parthia (modern Iran), Lycaonia (modern Turkey), and northern India. The Church of Armenia has a national tradition that Jude Thaddeus and Bartholomew visited the Armenians early in the first century and introduced Christianity to the worshippers of the god Ahura Mazda. The new faith spread throughout the land, and in 302 A.D., St. Gregory the Illuminator baptized the king of Armenia, Dertad the Great, along with many of his followers. Since Dertad was probably the first ruler to embrace Christianity for his nation, the Armenians proudly claim they were the first Christian state.

Accounts of Bartholomew's death vary widely, but like all of the apostles except for John he was known to have died a martyr's death.

**Jeopardy for Catholics** – Here’s the way this works. We will give you the definition of an important aspect of Catholicism as defined in the “The Mary Knoll Catholic Dictionary,” and ask you to name it. As always, your answer must worded in the form of a question. This month we’re focusing on the nine different levels of angels. Here goes.

- *Number 1:* These angels are the lowest order of angels and are one of the two ranks of angels that are traditionally said to interact with humans in the course of daily life. In some cases, these angels serve only as a messenger, but in other instances, they take responsibility for the well-being of individuals in trouble, offering them sustenance, or leading them out of danger. (Hint: Think Clarence in the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life.”)
- *Number Two:* These angels are the eighth ranking order of angels. There are differences views regarding the number of these angels, so we’ll just focus on the four most widely recognized: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. (Hint: Think John Travolta in one of his best films that included a road trip from Iowa to Chicago.)
- *Number 3.* Tradition places these angels in the highest rank in Christian angelology. The prophet Isaiah provided a vivid description of them. “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne. Above it stood angels; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (HINT: Think about the lyrics to “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name.”)



The answers are provided on the final page of Grace Notes.

### The “Big Tent” Approach to Mass

Many people have used the expression “The Big Tent” to refer to a place where diverse voices and different approaches are welcome, as long as the voices and the approaches all have a common objective. For the past three months “Grace Notes” has been written from a desk in an Airstream Camper, which has traveled nearly 6,000 miles and through 22 states. We thought it would be interesting to share our experiences with the different ways in which the mass is being celebrated around the country. And while there certainly were some wide swings in the approach each church took to the mass, we can confirm that there were no holes in the tent, and that each mass we attended definitely had the same objective: to memorialize Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**St. Paul’s in Orwell, Vermont** – St. Paul’s was a tiny church, which was packed with perhaps 75 participants. Nonetheless, the great acoustics and the spirited congregation made it sound like we were in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. The service was virtually identical to the service at Holy Redeemer, although the parish has a few unique traditions. We only got to experience one, which was part of the church’s Father’s Day celebration. At the conclusion of mass all of the father’s received a package of

homemade chocolate chip cookies. What a treat.





**St. Joseph's in Spearfish, South Dakota –**

We attended mass at St. Joseph's on two successive Sundays. They have a large parish, with numerous children. (Southwestern South Dakota is one of the fastest growing areas in one of the fastest-growing states.) Although the basic service was the same as Holy Redeemer, there were several interesting additions. After mass the entire congregation knelt and silently prayed for the next parishioner who passes away by saying three Hail Mary's. There was also a "Children's Offertory Collection" after the regular collection, in which children brought up quarters and dollar bills and placed them in a basket held by the priest. One particularly interesting difference was that there were more than a dozen mostly young women wearing head coverings (typically a black lace veil) during mass. When they received communion they all knelt and received communion on the tongue.

**All Saint's in Rossford, Ohio –**The service was also virtually identical to the service at Holy Redeemer, with the exception that Communion was given under both species: the sacred host and the precious blood. The only other item that was particularly memorable was the large choir, which included nine members, several of whom played musical instruments. The Choir Director played the piano, and with such vigor that he mostly drowned out the entire choir.





**Assumption Abbey in Richardton, North Dakota** -- Assumption Abbey is home to 35 Benedictine monks. In addition to attending Sunday mass, we had a great tour of the abbey, visited the gift shop where the oldest of the monks was working the cash register (and selling his book, "How To Be A Monastic And Not Give Up Your Day Job"), and where another monk offered to show us the Abbey's wine cellar. When we finally headed home we were loaded down with Christmas gifts and half a case of the Abbey's wine.

Although the service was virtually identical to the service at Holy Redeemer there was quite a bit of chanting, lending a very medieval, Gregorian feel to the proceedings.

**St. Mary's in Livingston, Montana** – The service at St. Mary's was the most unique we encountered. We all said a "Hail Mary" before the priest gave his homily, and at the conclusion of the mass we all knelt and recited a prayer to St. Michael the Archangel and another prayer for religious vocations. The choir consisted of three women with angelic voices who sang mostly in Latin. We and the rest of the congregation could keep up with the first few bars – "Gloria in excelsis deo," Agnus dei," Kyrie elision," etc. -- but after that we were all lost. There were more than two dozen women wearing head coverings (most of whom appeared to be in their teens or twenties), and all of them knelt for communion and received the host on their tongue. There was also a large kneeler at the front of the church that was used as a make-shift communion rail, with two altar boys on either side of the priest holding gold patens. The approach to communion was something that neither of us had seen since we were in high school.





**Christ the King in Idaho Falls, Idaho** – The Mormon religion dominates Idaho, so we were not surprised to discover a relatively small number of Catholic churches. What was surprising was that half of the masses are conducted in Spanish. The service we attended was in English, and it was packed. In addition to the priest and deacon, the mass also included five altar servers (and an adult altar supervisor), a lector, a five-person choir led by a pianist, a young cantor (whose magnificent operatic voice will someday take her to Broadway), and a half-dozen Eucharistic Ministers. Interestingly, for the second time during our travels this summer Communion was offered under both species. There were fewer women wearing head coverings than we saw in the South Dakota or Montana churches we visited. The mass per se was the same as we are used to at Holy Redeemer, with two exceptions: first, the priest chanted his text throughout the mass, and second, at the conclusion of the mass the congregation knelt and said a prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, which was followed by a Hail Mary.

**Our Lady of the Mountains in Estes Park, Colorado** – No great surprise that a church on the very edge of the Rocky Mountain National Park, with its log cabin design and modernistic stained-glass windows, would be one of the most picturesque church we visited all summer. (The *most* picturesque church was the nearby Chapel on the Rock, but more about that later.) There was little difference between the service conducted at Our Lady of the Mountains and the one we are familiar with at Holy Redeemer, with the exception that more of the mass was chanted. There was a small, two-person choir that was accompanied by piano and guitar.

The trend of women wearing head coverings that we've noted in a number of churches in the West ended at Our Lady of the Mountains; the only "women" with head coverings that we noticed were two pre-teens who decided to dress up their outfits with colorful hats.







### **Chapel on the Rock in Allenspark, Colorado**

-- In 1916, Monsignor Joseph Bosetti came across a large rock formation just east of Rocky Mountain National Park. Inspired by the Biblical phrase "upon this rock I will build my church", he envisioned a church built on the rock. For nearly 20 years he struggled to raise money to build his church. With help from some prominent donors the church was finally completed in 1936, and in 1999 it was designated as a historic site.

Pope John Paul II prayed at the chapel during his visit to Denver for World Youth Day in 1993, and he blessed the chapel afterwards. The Pope later hiked in the surrounding woods.

In November 2011 the Chapel on the Rock was spared from a devastating fire that destroyed most of the surrounding area. Interestingly, the Chapel also survived historic flooding in 2013, which again devastated most of the surrounding area.

We were not able to attend a service at the Chapel, one of the few regrets from our summer travels.

### **St. Joseph's in Nortonville, Kansas – St.**

Joseph's is very well known to us, since we have many relatives who live in or around the tiny farming community of Nortonville and we have attended mass there many times. Indeed, we attended the wedding of a cousin at St. Joseph's the day before Sunday mass. St. Joseph's has only a few differences in their approach compared to Holy Redeemer. A number of parishioners arrive before mass to say a collective rosary, they have a "Children's Offertory Collection," and they say a prayer to Michael the Archangel at the conclusion of mass. They also have a former grade school across the street from the church with a kitchen large enough to handle a royal visit, which they use mainly to prepare several hundred "Fish Fry Dinners" every Friday during Lent. Finally several of our cousins have a tradition of repairing to the house of the cousin living closest to St. Joseph's for Bloody Mary's after mass, and we always cherish the time we get to spend with them.



Needless to say the various masses we have attended across the country have been a very illuminating and very pleasant experience. That said, we're both looking forward to returning to Holy Redeemer in September.

### **Getting to Know the Members of the Parish – Ralph Silvester**

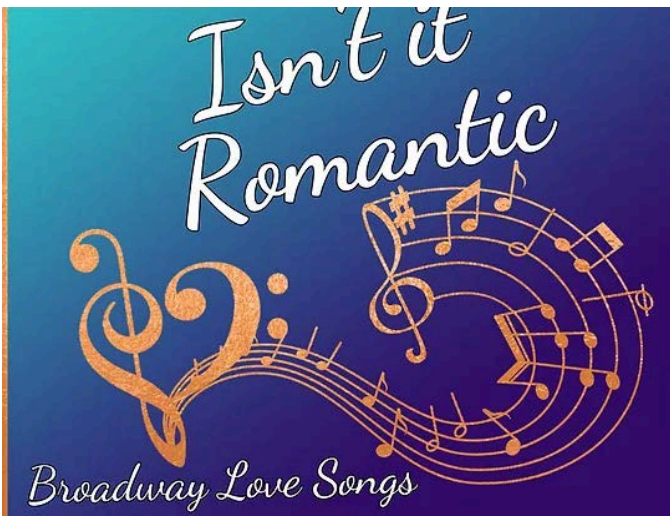
Ralph Silvester spent more than twenty years in the construction business, and also founded his own construction company. But it would be incorrect to characterize him based simply on those aspects of his career, because Ralph is a builder in the broadest terms. For starters he built his own house, laying over 17,000 bricks by himself. That's an accomplishment that the renowned bricklayer want-to-be Winston Churchill can't match. He also built St. Anthony's Church in Colchester, Connecticut, and for good measure renovated another church in nearby Simsbury. Aside from Sidney Poitier in the movie "Lilies of the Field," who else do you know that built a church with their own hands. And Ralph's efforts at church building carry a lot more weight than Sidney Poitier's since the latter's church only existed on celluloid.



And lastly and perhaps most importantly, Ralph and his late wife Madeline built a strong family of four sons – Sal, Frank, R.J., and Michael – and numerous grandchildren, based on the excellent examples that the two of them set.



So it should come as no surprise that someone like Ralph has also spent over 20 years helping to build a strong, loyal, and engaged community at Holy Redeemer. He has been active in the Holy Redeemer St. Vincent de Paul Society since 2009 and also served as Conference President for several years. Together with Madeline, Ralph has been described as one of the “go-to” parishioners you could always depend on to help with every parish project or event.



Having already alluded to their devotion to each other, and the strong partnership they forged, it would only be fitting that they also had a storybook courtship. The seeds for their wedding in 1968 were in fact planted at another wedding in New York City a year earlier. Although they did not know each other when they met at the reception something clicked immediately. Talking led to dancing and dancing led to a late-night horse-drawn carriage ride around Central Park. And they next thing they knew they were married and honeymooning in Grand Canyon. If there was a soundtrack to their first meeting, their courtship, and their wedding – indeed their entire 53-year marriage – it would have to be “Isn’t It Romantic.”

No parish can be successful without a Ralph Silvester; a builder who can construct the foundation that inspires other members of the parish to join him in forging a vibrant congregation. For his many efforts, in 2022 Ralph Silvester was awarded the Marian Medal, the Diocese of Fall River’s lay service award. While the Marian Medal isn’t awarded posthumously or given to more than one recipient per parish, Ralph wanted everyone to know that the award really belong to Madeline as much as to him. And anyone who ever met the two of them would wholeheartedly agree.



## ...Conclusion

Somerset High School student J.R. Gilbert is a special needs student, dealing with hydrocephalus (a neurological disorder caused by an abnormal buildup of cerebrospinal fluid within the brain) and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). He wears size 13 shoes but spends most of his time wearing a pair of his grandfather's ill-fitting size 10 boots which he loves.

A fellow Somerset student – 17-year-old Sal Solis -- was sitting in his second-period class looking at shoes on his phone when J.R. wobbled by, wearing his too-small boots. “You know anybody that has some size 13 shoes?” J.R. asked. Sal shook his head, and J.R. limped away. Sal told a friend about the odd encounter, and they decided they needed to do something. The something turned out to be a fundraiser to buy shoes that fit J.R.'s feet.

By the end of the first day, Sal and his classmates had collected enough money to buy a pair of Nike's trendiest athletic shoes. The next day they collected enough to buy a second pair. One pair was red, the other was green. The students surprised J.R. with the two new pairs of Nike's, in a moment that the students captured with their phones.



JR Gilbert, and his new shoes. (Photo courtesy of Lydia Hernandez)

The Somerset Independent School District [posted a video of the gift-giving on Facebook](#), which immediately went viral and has now been viewed millions of times. (If the link provided does not work insert the following into the search tab on your browser: “Somerset HS Students Surprise Classmate with Christmas Shoes”). “When I watch that video, I feel a sense of pride,” said Somerset Mayor Lydia Hernandez, who also works at the school. “Not only to be proud to work at the school district and know that our students are so amazing and so kindhearted. But [for] the community as well. Because our students grow up to be adults that live in the community. It speaks volumes for the type of community that we are.”

“We always say that we’re a small community with a big heart. And that video truly is the definition of Somerset and who we strive to be here.”

When J.R.'s mother Linda was asked what she hoped people took away from the video of her son receiving his new shoes she replied: "the spirit of giving." She added "it doesn't have to be a family member or a friend. Just doing something out of the kindness of your heart that makes you feel good and can make somebody else feel good. And that maybe this video can erase some of the hate that's been generated."

*NOTE: The story of J.R. and his classmates is from an article by Sarah Larimer of the Washington Post.*

## Answers to Jeopardy for Catholics

Answer to Number One: Who are the guardian angels?



Answer to Number Two: Who are the archangels?



Answer to Number Three: Who are the Seraphim?

