



Glory to God

in the highest,
and on earth peace
to those on whom His favor rests.
Luke 2:14 - Christmas 2021



THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD • DECEMBER 24TH-25TH

ST. GERTRUDE CHURCH

INFORMATION ABOUT ST. GERTRUDE PARISH

Interested in Joining St. Gertrude Church?

Visit stgertrude.org/register to fill out a new parishioner registration form. You can also find copies of the registration form in the church and the parish office.

We look forward to meeting you!



WEEKLY LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Sunday

8:00 a.m. Mass
10:00 a.m. Conventual Mass*
12:00 p.m. Mass
6:00 p.m. Mass

Monday-Friday

7:00 a.m. Mass
8:00 a.m. Mass
11:30 a.m. Conventual Mass*
12:00 p.m. Midday Prayer
4:00 p.m. Confession

Wednesday

7:30 p.m. Adoration (Church) and Confession

Saturday

8:00 a.m. Conventual Mass*
11:30 a.m. Mass
3:30 p.m. Confession
4:30 p.m. Mass (Anticipated)

**This Mass is celebrated with our Dominican novices and friars who live in the priory. Parts of the Mass are sung in Latin—lyrics can often be found in the St. Michael Hymnal in the pews.*

Adoration

The Mother of Mercy Adoration Chapel is open every day from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

To learn more or to sign up for a specific time, visit stgertrude.org/adoration.



ENJOY BREAKFAST AT ST. GERTRUDE CHURCH!



Date: Sunday, January 9, 2022
Location: Gym
Time: 8:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
Cost: \$8/person | \$28/family
\$4/children grades K-8
Children 5 & under - Free

PANCAKES
EGGS
SAUSAGE



Gluten/dairy free menu available

ALL YOU CAN EAT!

Credit cards accepted

Sponsored and prepared by
Archbishop Elder Council



Parish Office Info

6543 Miami Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45243
(513) 561-5954 | www.stgertrude.org

Parish Office Hours

Monday-Friday: 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

School Office Hours

Monday-Friday: 7:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m.

Church Hours

Every day: 7:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

Come see us at our **OPEN HOUSE**

Sunday
January 30, 2022
1:00-3:00 p.m.

NOW ENROLLING FOR 2022-2023



6543 Miami Ave.
Madelira, OH 45243
(513) 562-8020
stgertrudesch.org
@stgertrudeschool



For over 85 years, St. Gertrude School has been led by the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia.



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS!

Merry Christmas! I'm so pleased that you have joined the St. Gertrude parish family for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. He is the reason for our hope and joy in a world that can be dark and sad in so many ways. So often, we call out to God for help, have a powerful

desire for God to change our circumstances, or are frustrated that God allows evil and sickness instead of preventing these challenges. Indeed, we are keenly aware that human life is fragile and vulnerable, and our hearts yearn to see God—and to see him work in a mighty way.

As we gather together for this Christmas feast, we bring all these "realities" with us and find the cause of our joy in God's response to the demands of our hearts. In the birth of Jesus, our God is made manifest to the

world. He has united himself to our human nature. He has become flesh. He has made his

God continually draws near to us in every facet of our lives.

He offers himself to us. He offers us love, grace, and mercy.

He offers us strength and consolation as we face our trials, questions, weaknesses, fears, worries, anxieties, and frustrations.

home among us. In truth, we are able to look God in the face through his infant son. I don't know about you, but looking at him is disarming. His face draws human tenderness out of my heart. His small, sleeping body inspires me to silence. His vulnerability causes the desire to hold him. Looking at him overcomes the incessant looking at myself and thinking about myself. Without saying a word or doing a thing, God touches my life and changes me.

This Christmas encounter with Jesus fully human and fully divine is the essence of our parish life here at St. Gertrude Church. He is present when we gather for worship, celebrate the sacraments, study sacred Scripture, participate in faith formation programs, and engage in works of service within and outside of the parish. God continually draws near to us in every facet of our lives. He

You have come home for Christmas Mass, and it is good that you are here. You are always welcome here throughout the year.



offers himself to us. He offers us love, grace, and mercy. He offers us strength and consolation as we face our trials, questions, weaknesses, fears, worries, anxieties, and frustrations.

Regular participation in parish life draws us into a more personal and vibrant relationship with God. He loves us. He desires friendship and communion with us. He supports daily life with grace and strengthens our hope. As we approach a new year when many people make resolutions,

I invite you to find support for your resolutions here at St. Gertrude. Would you like to grow in your prayer life? We can help you. Would you like to learn more about the Catholic faith? We can help you. Would you like to find support for your vocation as husband/father or wife/mother? We can help you.

You have come home for Christmas Mass, and it is good that you are here. You are always welcome here throughout the year. This special

Christmas bulletin provides information on some of the things that we offer here at St. Gertrude. Please consider how you could participate in the life of your parish family. You remain in my prayers for a holy Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Let us love one another and pray for each other.

Fr. George, O.P.

Father George Schommer, O.P.

COVER IMAGE:

Adoration of the Shepherds (Detail), Mengs (1764-65)



THE INTANGIBLES

TRAVIS JOHNSON, ST. GERTRUDE
SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

As Catholic parents, there is plenty for us to concern ourselves with when it comes to our children's education and deciding which school they will attend. . .

We worry about not having control, the culture, and the what-ifs and unknowns (especially those "other kids" and families we're not acquainted with). We worry about the many things that may impact family time, and we stress over perceptions and rumors. We worry about government influence and mandates—or maybe the lack thereof. We worry about "my child's exposure to *fill in the blank*." We question standards and curriculum choices and opine about educational philosophy and methodology. We worry about math and "how they are teaching it these days." On one hand, we worry about too much technology in the classroom. On the other hand, we worry about not enough technology in the classroom. We worry that our kids will not read Shakespeare and learn their American history as they should. Or maybe they'll read too much Shakespeare and learn more history than we'd like? We worry about Latin and debate its usefulness. We worry about test scores and make ourselves sick over where to enroll our kids for high school. And if time and space permit, we can always worry more about math.

Regardless of the importance of these matters, we, as parents, would do well to avoid reducing education to that one thing—that one concern, whatever it may be. *Why?* Because Catholic education, like the Catholic faith, is so much more than that one thing. When we step back and broaden our focus, we find those things that are often overlooked, taken for granted, or perhaps never even considered when it comes to our children's education. We find the intangibles—the things that can't be touched, are impossible to define, and aren't easily measured *but have incredible value*.

Here are just some of the intangibles that you'll find at St. Gertrude School:

- Long-established and structured school in a Catholic environment.
- Stability and record academic growth despite all the recent disruptions and distractions.
- Order and routine.
- Active atmosphere that is purposeful, good, and keeps children connected to their peers and community.
- A place where children are respected as individuals and formed as boys and girls, male and female.
- Catholic and faith formation that is organic and occurs in a context that makes sense.

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- High expectations that build mental stamina and endurance for whatever challenge is next (just ask our graduates).
 - Leadership that is principled, sensible, and measured.
 - Teachers that are professional, experienced, and know how to work together year after year.
 - Teachers who are Catholic and faithful and who love their students and want the best for them.
 - Experienced staff, established systems, and interventions to help students when they struggle.
 - A parent-teacher organization that is stable, active, and present.
 - A school advisory council that is diverse in its expertise, committed, and strategic.
 - A place where students are free to be children and are not asked to bear (or even have an opinion about) the world's problems.
 - A place where students are given the space to make mistakes, to learn and understand, and then keep moving.
 - A place where children are protected, but with deliberation and a view towards maturity and capability.
 - A place where children interact with (and learn how to interact with) other kids who don't live in the same house.
 - A place where children are taught manners and etiquette and faced with daily opportunities to practice virtue.
 - A place where the students are given frequent opportunities and unique experiences that stretch beyond the classroom desk.
 - Time for play and laughter.
 - A place where students are known.
 - A place where children become a part of a greater community and enduring Catholic school tradition that gives meaning and purpose and fosters lifelong connections and friendships.
 - A school that is run by the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, a religious order that knows, better than most, the value of Catholic education and how to deliver it.
 - A school that is the beneficiary of a supportive parish and the Dominican friars.
 - Above all, a place where students smile and are genuinely happy.
- On behalf of our school faculty, I invite you to consider—or reconsider—St. Gertrude School, a school that is rooted in Catholicism and tradition and shaped by the Dominican charism. A school where we gather in faith and are guided by truth, and where students grow in excellence. I invite you to join an established Catholic school community of families and trained educators who will support you, listen to you, stand by you, and battle alongside you for the mind, heart, and soul of your children.

At St. Gertrude School, it's the intangibles that make the difference. And, while they may not eliminate your concerns, hopefully they ease some of your worries and remind you that sometimes what you're looking for is right in front of you—or just across the parking lot.

**A PARENT’S PERSPECTIVE:
WHAT I LEARNED THROUGH CATECHESIS
OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

AMY TOFT, ST. GERTRUDE CHURCH PARISHIONER

“Mom, God wants me to be a saint!”

It is incredibly remarkable to me that these words of wisdom came from my six-year-old son. Trying to raise our boys in the Church is so challenging, not because the Church makes it hard for us, but because I know that for my children to learn the deepest truths of life, I must be the first example. Yikes! The role of a parent



is irreplaceable and divinely given, yet who am I to be an inspiration of holiness for my kids? They are the people who see me at my absolute worst!

I’m convinced now more than ever that, yes, my children need me and

my husband, but that I desperately need help if I’m going to have any semblance of success in my life’s work of raising saints.

I had heard about Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) for years, admiring from a distance the concept of “Catholic Montessori” to teach catechesis. It sounded nice. In fact, it sounded like a place where teachers would better understand my children’s developmental stages and therefore know them on more spiritual and cognitive levels. At least, this is what

I thought of the *I wasn’t necessarily prepared for how much CGS would impact our entire family.*

two of our sons in CGS. The first atrium* experience was fine. I was happy to have a solid, Catholic preschool setting that I could trust and would give my kids a new experience. However, as we continued through that first year, I wasn’t necessarily prepared for how much CGS would impact our entire family.

Here’s what I learned through CGS (yes, me, not just my kids):

1. The catechists don’t know my kids better than I do, but they are beautifully trained. The way in which these teachers instruct my kids is from a tremendous place of love and patience. Every lesson is passionate and true, and my kids, like me, are drawn to truth and beauty.
2. Time in the atrium (CGS class) is a holy hour. Not to be confused with adoration, but my children’s time in that space is truly sacred. When they enter, there’s an instant calm and peace. The room is for them, at their level in every way. From the work (activities) they do to the explanation of the lessons they are learning, it’s for them. I love that there isn’t anything watered down. My kids want truth. Everything that is taught is taught in

its entirety, but never overwhelming.

3. The Holy Spirit is on the move. The Spirit is at work, speaking to their young hearts in ways I never anticipated. To put it simply, the atrium opens opportunities for the Lord to work in young hearts. Experiences my kids have shared and notes that they wrote could only be prompted by having a relational experience with their Creator.

I love the atrium. I love that my children have incredibly powerful experiences in the atrium. I love that they love the atrium. They look

I want my children to become saints, and this isn’t something my husband or I can do on our own.

forward to each class, and when their hearts are touched by Love, it’s transformative in ways that impact our entire family—for the better!

I want my children to become saints, and this isn’t something my husband or I can do on our own. We need help. We need community and grace. St. Gertrude Church and School provide this, and our experiences with CGS enhance these experiences. Because, if there’s one thing CGS can teach us all, it’s that our children can make saints out of us, too!

**The atrium is a peaceful environment for children ages three through grade three to encounter God’s love and develop a relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd through contemplation and hands-on work with materials.*

**CATECHESIS OF
THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

A faith formation experience for children

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is a Montessori-influenced faith formation experience for children age three through grade three that introduces young ones to Jesus the Good Shepherd and nurtures a deep, personal relationship with him through prayer, Scripture, reflection, and hands-on work (activities).

We also offer a beautiful parent/child program for those who are preparing to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Communion.



For more information about Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, please visit stgertrude.org/cgs.





A PROGRAM UNLIKE ANY OTHER

KATE NOONE, ST. GERTRUDE
CHURCH PARISHIONER

Hello! My name is Kate Noone, and my family and I are parishioners here at St. Gertrude Church. I went through the St. Gertrude Become Catholic program (formerly RCIA) and received the sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil Mass in April of 2019. It was an incredible and memorable day that I hold very close to my heart.

Growing up as a Protestant, I was initially interested and inspired by the faith when I met my husband, David, a practicing Catholic. We knew we wanted to raise our children in the Catholic Church, and it was just a matter of time to hear God's calling and find the right RCIA program for me. We found St. Gertrude soon after a successful relocation to Cincinnati from Chicago for David's career. We were very impressed with the religious education programming for our four young children, and I began to research the RCIA program and weigh the timing and expected commitment to become a catechumen.

There are a few stand out reasons that led me to join the Become Catholic program specifically here at St. Gertrude. First, the commitment and instruction from the priests and Evangelization team at St. Gertrude is unlike any other parish in the city. The program is organized and structured to maximize the teachings of the Church in a supportive, open, and encouraging environment. Secondly, the

curriculum of the program incorporates not only the history of the Roman Catholic Church but also the modern day catechism and instructions on how to live life faithfully in today's chaotic world. Finally, to be able to learn and grow in your faith with the same group of students on a weekly basis in a prayerful setting . . . I knew I would maximize my experience and absorb as much as possible in the nearly yearlong program. I met some incredible people in the Become Catholic program and am lucky to still call some fellow RCIA candidates from that year close friends!

The Become Catholic program here at St. Gertrude is truly a gift for us parishioners, having this type of support and structured program in place not only for Christians looking into living life as a Catholic but also as a means of further education for those looking for a refresh and

This program encouraged me to strengthen my faith and commitment to the Church and for this, I am truly grateful.

modern day inspiration. With St. Gertrude being the home to the Dominican friars, the emphasis and commitment on education is felt all the

way through to the Become Catholic program and curriculum. This program encouraged me to strengthen my faith and commitment to the Church and for this, I am truly grateful.

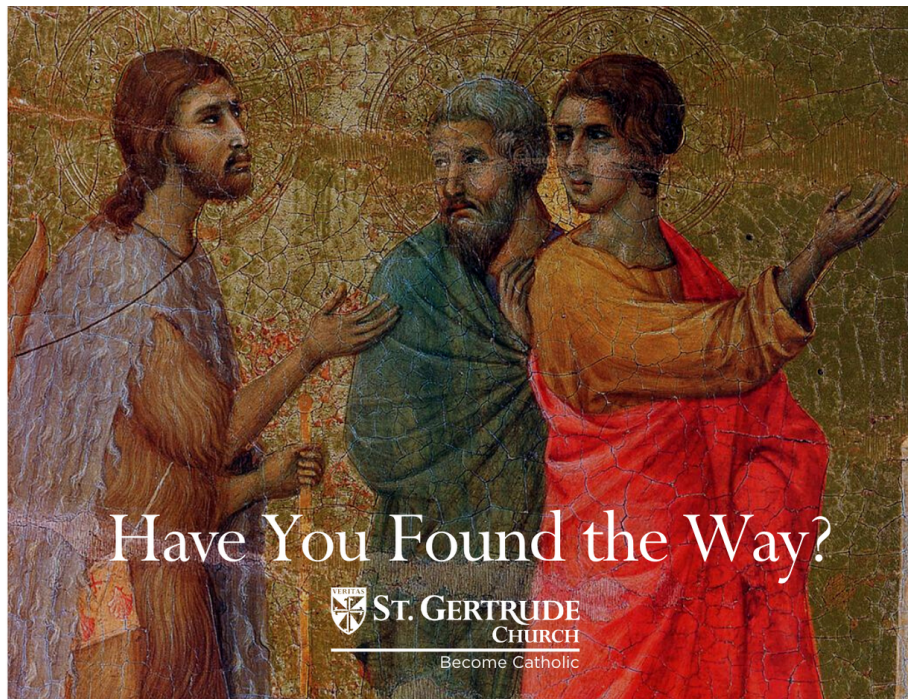
If you aren't Catholic and are interested in becoming Catholic—or if you *are* Catholic and never received all the sacraments of initiation—I really encourage you to look into St. Gertrude's Become Catholic program. For those who are already parishioners at St. Gertrude, let us continue to pray for the catechumens, candidates, and sponsors committed to the program, as well as the Evangelization team and priests that go above and beyond to make the program as purposeful and inspirational as possible.

Do you yearn for a sense of belonging within a faith community? Have you ever wondered what your purpose is or what is the best way to live?

Our Become Catholic program may be for you.

The early followers of Jesus found the answers to all of life's questions and the fulfillment of their deepest desires in Jesus. Formerly known as RCIA, Become Catholic is a program for men and women who would like to join the Catholic Church for the first time or become fully initiated members of the Church.

For more information, please visit stgertrude.org/become-catholic.



Have You Found the Way?

 **ST. GERTRUDE**
CHURCH
Become Catholic



EVERY MISSION HAS SOMETHING VALUABLE TO OFFER

St. Gertrude Bulletin talked with longtime parishioners Jim and AnnaMaria Spurgin about their experiences at St. Gertrude's many parish missions. The interview that follows is just a snapshot of their beautiful and awe-inspiring story of reversion.

St. Gertrude Bulletin: Tell us a little bit about yourselves.

AnnaMaria: My family moved to Madeira when I was five, and we immediately joined St. Gertrude Parish, which makes me a parishioner for 57-plus years. I am the oldest of three siblings, all graduates of St. Gertrude School. Jim moved to Cincinnati from South Bend, Indiana, when he was one. He is the youngest of four and also attended a Catholic grade school. We both attended Catholic high schools, and it was during that time that God brought us together. We were married at St. Gertrude seven years later on May 29, 1982. God blessed us with two wonderful daughters, and his blessings continued years later as we welcomed into our family our son-in-laws and six beautiful granddaughters. (Grandchild number seven is expected to arrive in early March 2022.) Our daughters, also married at St. Gertrude, are both graduates of St. Gertrude School, where our two oldest granddaughters are currently enrolled. Three generations of Bulldogs! Jim owns a small contract package company and also works part-time as a business manager for a parish on the west side. I have had the opportunity to be a teacher's aide in the school and the privilege to serve our parishioners for the past nine and a half years as the wedding/bereavement coordinator, which makes my December 8 retirement bittersweet.

We consider St. Gertrude our second home. This parish has been an influential part of our lives and that of our children and grandchildren. We love and value the Dominican friars and sisters, who were instrumental in our reversion. Our longing to understand our Catholic faith led us to seek Christ more fully through participation in eucharistic adoration and the parish mission.

SGB: What prompted you to attend your first parish mission at St. Gertrude?

AnnaMaria: In the summer of 1996, one of the Dominican priests, Father James Sullivan, O.P., was greeting parishioners after Mass. He drew me into conversation and in the course of our discussion, I said something about being Catholic. He asked me, "What does that mean when you say you're Catholic?" And I said, "You know, it means I was baptized Catholic." He kept challenging me: "Do you understand your Catholic faith, the teachings of the Church, and what it means when you say you are Catholic?" I thought I did, but in all honesty, I really didn't. It made me uncomfortable. There was something about his questions and his challenge to me to understand my Catholic faith that I couldn't let go of.

Later that fall, Father was offering a six or eight-week series on the Catholic faith. I kept seeing information on the series in the bulletin and couldn't get this series out of my mind. (I didn't understand at the time that this was the prompting of the Holy Spirit). I kept fighting the feeling, but it didn't go away, so I hesitantly registered. I was nervous but attended each meeting and just listened. [The series] gave me a thirst to learn about my Catholic faith. There was a desire that [God] was planting in my heart and soul—and eventually in Jim's—to come to know Him and what it meant to be Catholic. One of the best ways [to learn more] is through the parish mission.

SGB: Is there one mission in particular that stands out?

AnnaMaria: They've all been so good but in different ways. Some have impacted us more so than others. In the beginning of our renewed faith journey, we both had an expectation of what we wanted out of the mission. If one of the evenings didn't meet a preconceived notion, I'd think to myself, "This would have been good for *that* person to hear," or, "I wish they'd spoken more about . . ." And what God has taught me over time is that he has called me [to that mission] for a purpose. What does God want *me* to hear and receive? I'm not in control here, God is. Powerful or not, he has taught me that every mission has something valuable to offer.

Jim: That reminds me of a saying I've been living by for a long time: "I can't control the outcome, just my effort." The fact that I go, that I show up, that I'm there—that's the most important thing. You never know how God wants to touch our souls when we say yes to him."

SGB: What would you say to someone who is hesitant to attend a parish mission?

AnnaMaria: Embrace the hesitancy, because it's okay. God is trying to speak to you and that's where that uneasiness comes from. You are God's child, and he desires to draw you closer to himself, and that can feel scary. Take that hesitancy or fear to the parish mission, but then give it to Jesus on the cross. Take one talk at a time, listening with an open heart, trusting that God will be gentle with you. Even if you take away just one small bit of insight, God will multiply that small nugget of insight in ways that you never could have imagined.

Jim: After being diagnosed with cancer last year, I realized the most important thing is prioritizing the time I spend praying and listening to God. All we have is today. The parish mission is one way for us to take time to do this. I say this prayer daily to help me say yes to God's will, not mine: "Dear Jesus, grant me the grace of self-surrender."

YOU'RE INVITED TO

The Presence of God

A Lenten Parish Mission with the Dominican Friars

Monday, April 4, 2022 – Wednesday, April 6, 2022
St. Gertrude Church

Morning Session - 8:30 a.m. | Evening Session - 7:00 p.m.
Culminates with a healing service on Wednesday evening

You do not need to be Catholic to attend.
Look for more information in future bulletins.





THE ONE HOUR THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

MARK HOLLAND, ST. GERTRUDE CHURCH PARISHIONER, FOURTH DEGREE KNIGHT OF COLUMBUS, AND PASTORAL COUNCIL MEMBER

I was a single parent.

In August 1988, I purchased my current home in Madeira. My daughter, Lauren, was entering third grade, and my son, Ryan, was entering kindergarten. Life was great! Both of my children were living with me about five days a week.

I met Sherri on August 28, 1991. Sherri is a cradle Catholic who graduated from Mount Notre Dame High School. I was 38 and not Catholic, and she was 36.

Less than two months later on October 10, I asked Sherri to marry me. We got married (outside of the Catholic Church) on February 14, 1992, and we will celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary next year!

Ryan was 28 years old when my father passed away in January 2013. He had spent countless evenings with my dad, mom, and me at the hospital and at hospice. This last evening, my mom went home, and Ryan stayed to sit with me. Ryan and I spent a few quality hours together that night . . .

“Is Grandpa going to be cremated?” Ryan asked.

“Yes, that is Grandpa’s wish,” I told him.

“Where will he be buried?”

“Spring Grove Cemetery,” I said.

“Have I ever been there?” Ryan asked.

“No, but you will be there in a few days.”

“Are you going to be cremated?”

“Yes, that is also my wish,” I replied.

Then, looking him in the eye, I said, “I do not think I will be making that decision for you because you will certainly outlive me.”

We both chuckled together.

“Dad, that’s my wish too. If something were to happen to me, that’s my wish, too!”

I told him I loved his sense of humor. We hugged and kissed and then both retired for the evening. My dad passed that night after Ryan and I left hospice. I’m sure Dad heard the entire conversation.

Ryan celebrated his 29th birthday in June 2013. In July, Ryan moved into an apartment in Norwood across from Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center.

In August 2013, Sherri had a desire to start attending St. Gertrude Church. She asked me if I would join her, so we started attending Mass every week. I was trying to understand Catholicism, but it was very difficult for me.

That year, our family celebrated Christmas Day at our home in Madeira. After lunch, we reminisced about how our family was growing

up. We opened gifts and played games. My only grandson, Jacob, really took to Ryan because he did not see Ryan very much. Jacob was three years old. Ryan was the last to leave that evening, and he said he had a great time!

On Thursday, January 2, 2014, the forecast called for the first snowfall of the season.

Snow started falling around 2:00 p.m. Ryan was heading to see his mom who lived in New Richmond, Ohio. He got in an accident when his car hit black ice and hit another car head on. Ryan died in the ambulance on his way to Mercy Hospital.

The next day, we went to Spring Grove Cemetery to make arrangements. The funeral director asked if Ryan wanted to be buried or cremated? I told him about the conversation Ryan and I had the night my father passed away and that his wish was to be cremated. How many parents talk to their children about death and their wishes at 28 years old?

At a Mass in February 2014, Father André Joseph, O.P., St. Gertrude’s pastor at the time, started talking about holy eucharistic adoration.

He was looking for people to sign up to spend one hour per week in the presence of the Lord. After Mass, I signed up to adore every Sunday at 8:00 a.m. I was the first to sign up!

“That’s a big commitment!” Sherri said. “Are you sure you can even sign up since you’re not Catholic?”

“What do I need to do to become Catholic?” I asked her.

“Go to Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) classes,” she said.

I started going to adoration in June 2014. *I knew nothing about Catholicism. I did not understand the Holy Trinity. And I did not understand worship in the presence of the Lord.*

Then, while in adoration on the last Sunday of August 2014, I heard a voice in my heart tell me that I needed to join the Catholic Church. I had never heard that voice before. Who was it? Why now?

I met Sherri at 9:30 a.m. Mass and told her what I heard in adoration. She said it was the Holy Spirit.

“I guess that’s great . . . right?” I asked.

After his homily during Mass that Sunday, Father André Joseph said, “If you want to join the Catholic Church, RCIA is on Monday nights, starting tomorrow.”

So the very next evening, I went to RCIA!

In March 2015, I applied for an annulment of my first marriage.

It was approved. At the Easter Vigil the following year, I was baptized and received my First Communion, and Confirmation—I joined the Catholic Church. Sherri and I were married at St. Gertrude on Tuesday, March 29, 2015, at 7:00 p.m.

I attended RCIA for two years. The third year, I was asked to be a sponsor. In 2017, I joined St. Gertrude’s Pastoral Council, and in 2018, I became a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus.

Joining the Catholic Church has been the best experience of my life—and it all started with spending one hour with Jesus in adoration every week.

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**ASK A PRIEST—
DID GOD HAVE TO SAVE US
IN THIS WAY?**

FATHER JOHN MARK SOLITARIO, O.P.

Q: Did God have to become a man in order for humans to be forgiven and saved from their sins? Becoming human is a downgrade for God

and a gift that many people have not appreciated!

A: The divine plan that “went public” on the first Christmas was the greatest news imaginable for every human being and *definitely* nothing we asked for or deserved. Yet, belief that God saved sinful mankind through becoming one of us and then suffering and rising on our behalf is the distinctive Christian belief.¹ The Prologue to the Gospel according to St. John says this: “He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:10-12). In coming to understand who Jesus is and getting to know him through faith, something almost unthinkable is revealed. But why did God save us like he did?

Absolutely speaking, God did not have to send his Son to become one of us so that we could be saved. The Incarnation, the act by which God sent his divine Son to become a man in order to save human beings, did not have to be the case. God acted in freedom. God *chose* to save us in this way, explain Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, because it corresponded to his great goodness and was *the best way* for us. Here are the reasons Aquinas laid out in his *Summa*, with respectful reference to the great St. Augustine. The first five reasons for the Incarnation are positive ways we benefit from it. The second five are the negative paths that the Incarnation helps us avoid.

1. *Faith* is strongest when based on God’s own words. In becoming a man, the divine Son of God taught us what we needed to know directly.
2. There’s no better way to maintain *hope* in God’s care than to remember that he became a real partner, a close companion, to human beings.



3. If we ever perceive our *love* for God to turn cold, we only need to meditate on the love for mankind that he proved, starting that night in Bethlehem.
4. Becoming a man, Jesus led us back to God *by example*.
5. The Incarnation allows us full access to *his divinity* since God united himself with our humanity.
6. Satan’s grip on us mere mortals was loosened when God permanently associated himself with human beings through becoming incarnate.
7. Any pessimism about human dignity is undermined when we consider that God became one of us.
8. The Incarnation clears up any presumption on our part: humanity was healed *only* through God’s initiative!
9. Christ’s humility in the Incarnation convicts and cures human sins of pride.
10. Truly God and truly man, Jesus was uniquely equipped to free humanity from sin and restore it to God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms the teaching of Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in a more compact manner. In paragraphs 456-460, it lays out four reasons why God decided to become a man: to save us through reconciliation, to manifest God’s love, to be a model of holiness, and to make us partakers in the divine nature. These are good reasons why God saved us in the way he did. They’re worth deep, prolonged reflection and can help inspire gratitude in our hearts for what God revealed on that first Christmas. What else makes you think that the Incarnation was “the best way” God could have saved us?

Ask a Priest is the regular format for our Holy Teaching section. Submit your own question to bulletin@stgertrude.org for one of our Dominican priests to answer in the bulletin.

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 463.

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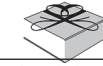
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