Our Lady of Grace
Catholic Parish

595 East Main Street · Avon Park, Florida 33825

4th Sunday of Advent **December 23, 2007**

"The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us."

Parish Office
· Phone: (863) 453-4757
· Fax: (863) 453-2620
· Monday through Friday
9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Pastor
Fr. Nicholas McLoughlin

Spanish Apostolate
Fr. José Gonzalez

Deacon
Fred Simon

Pastor Emeritus
Fr. Gerald Grogan

Assisting Clergy
Fr. Robert Onze
Fr. John Belfield
Fr. Leo Frechette

Administrative Assistant
Betty Heiring

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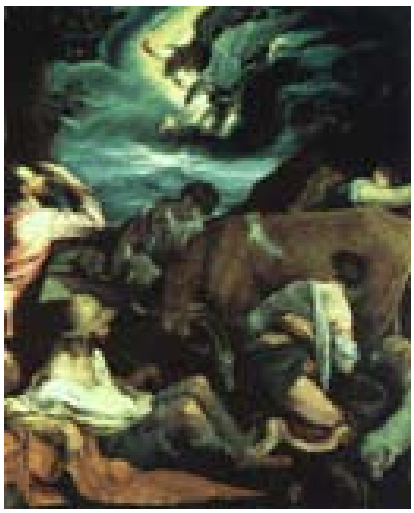
from our Pastor's desk

The Adoration of the Magi

Dear parishioners: There is a story told about a woman who was sitting beside a fire on Christmas evening. She was looking into the dancing flames wondering about the great mystery of the child birth in the manger. How could God leave His home in heaven and in the person of his Son, Jesus, take on our flawed human nature and become man? How could God, who became man, come in the form of a helpless child? How could God, who became man in the form of a helpless, innocent child, be born into such a humble family in such a humble, God-forsaken place? It was just all too much for the woman to fathom as she sat gazing into the dancing flames.

It was just at that moment she heard a rustling noise outside on the front lawn of her home. She went to the window. Looking out the window, she saw wild geese – probably Canadian geese – scattered all over the front lawn. They had obviously lost their way having lost contact with the lead formation of flying geese. They were lost and were crying out and cackling very loud as they rushed to and fro slidering and sliding on the frozen snow which carpeted the front lawn of the house. The woman felt sorry for them. She wanted to help them. She put on her winter coat, went outside to open the garage door so that she might be able to round-up the frightened, lost geese and provide some shelter and solace from the bitter winter elements for the night. The harder she tried to round them up, the more frightened and out of control they became. Finally, the woman gave up her futile effort. Then, she thought to herself, "what if I could become one of them?" "What if I could speak the language of the geese?" "What if I could just tell the geese that I was not trying to hurt them but that I was trying to help them?" Then it struck her like a bolt out of the blue. That was what the message and the mystery of Christmas was all about. That was what Jesus had done for us. He had left his true home in heaven. He looked down from heaven to earth and he saw that we were afraid and lost. He saw that we could do nothing to help ourselves. He found a watershed of "Easy Riders" 'lost' but 'searching'. He found, in the words of Bum Phillips, the legendary old country-boy-coach of the old Huston Oiler's team, "that the harder we tried the behinder we got." It was then that the message of Christmas became crystal clear for the woman standing alone on a moonlit Christmas night, on her snow carpeted lawn, looking at the noisiest, most lost flock of geese she had ever seen.

That was what the 'lost' confused shepherds discovered that first chilly Christmas night close to the God-forsaken village of Bethlehem. That was what the 'lost' star-gazing 'wise-men-from-the-east', representing the pagan world, discovered when they met with Herod at some nameless oasis in the desert. They discovered that God became one of us so that we could become one with Him. Here is how John the evangelist sums up the message and the mystery of Christmas: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (John 1: 16).



The Shepherds by Night

May you who feel like the shepherds "in the fields by night", or, like the 'wise men', lost-in-the-desert, find in the "Word made flesh" who makes "his dwelling among us", that for which you seek and search. **Christmas Mass schedule is as follows: Vigil Masses: 4:00, 5:30 & 7:00 p.m. (Spanish Mass); Christmas day: 8:00 & 10: 15 a.m.** A blessed Christmas to you and to your families. **Father Nicholas Mcloughlin**

End of the Year

Ways to Give

Giving is a very important part of the life of a person devoted to Jesus Christ. More Catholics are responding to the idea of giving a gift that forever perpetuates our Catholic Faith. There are many ways in which gifts can be made. Examples include: gifts of cash, securities, works of art, life insurance, royalties and other personal property, as well as gifts of real property. A gift can be made outright to your parish, school, diocese, Catholic Charities.

Bequests

A bequest is a concrete way to express gratitude to God for a lifetime of blessings. The gift you give also establishes a lasting legacy of love for others by enabling the Church to continue the preservation and expansion of our Catholic heritage through its many ministries. Simple bequests can easily be included in a donor's will or trust. If a will or trust is already written, then a codicil to a will, or an amendment to a trust, allows for a new provision to be added easily. The following legal working is sufficient for leaving a gift through a bequest:

> I bequeath the sum of $_____ or _____% of the residue of my estate to Bishop Frank J. Dewane, D.D., Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Venice, a corporation sole, whose principal office is located at 1000 Pinebrook Road, Venice FL 34285, for the benefit of (your parish, school, diocese, Catholic Charities or other agency or ministry of the diocese).

A bequest can be further directed according to the donors' wishes. Gifts restricted for a specific cause must be clearly stated. If you decide to include your parish, the diocese or Catholic Charities in your planning, please let us know. We want to say "thank you" and to thank God for you.

Christmas and the end of the year are good times to consider giving a gift to the Parish or the diocese. Our baptism commits us to work for and to support the wellbeing of the mission of Jesus whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas. Will you consider giving a gift?

Green Bay Packers Brett Favre and Wife Deanna Credit Catholic Faith

By Sam Lucero

Catholic News Service (www.catholicnews.com)

With the strength that comes from prayer, Green Bay Packer Brett Favre and his wife Deanna credit their Catholic faith with helping them face life's struggles. Among them, Deanna's breast cancer, which has been overcome.

GREEN BAY, Wis. (CNS) Most wins by a starting quarterback. Most consecutive games played by a quarterback. Most touchdown passes thrown. Fans of Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre relish counting the number of NFL records their hero owns. But Favre's wife Deanna, a breast cancer survivor, finds comfort in counting her blessings. The football star's wife was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. She spent four months undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatment. The following year, after her last radiation treatment, Deanna was declared cancer-free. She says the life-changing experience brought her closer to her husband and her Catholic faith. "I just feel like, with faith, it helps me see the good in everything," Deanna said in a telephone interview with The Compass, diocesan newspaper of Green Bay.The Favres are members of St. Agnes Parish in Green Bay during football season and St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Hattiesburg, Miss., during the off-season. Brett and Deanna both grew up in Kiln, Miss. Since overcoming breast cancer; Deanna has become a spokeswoman for breast cancer prevention. She founded the Deanna Favre HOPE Foundation in 2005, which provides grants for uninsured and underinsured women battling breast cancer.

Deanna's latest fundraising effort is the Oct. 1 release of an autobiographical book, "Don't Bet against Me: Beating the Odds against Breast Cancer and in Life," which she wrote with Angela Hunt. According to Deanna, stepping into the media spotlight wasn't something she wanted to do but she believes it was part of God's plan. At the time she was diagnosed, she and Brett were dealing with several family tragedies, including the death of her younger brother and Brett's father. Deanna also quickly learned that dealing quietly with her personal struggles wouldn't be possible. She resented the fact that her diagnosis made front-page headlines but she also came to understand that good could come from the publicity. She began receiving letters of encouragement from women around the country. She also received letters from women saying they were motivated to get breast examinations after hearing about her. She said for that reason alone she thinks her story was meant to be public.

Today, Deanna said her views on life have changed. She no longer takes life or relationships for granted, and she cherishes every day with Brett and daughters Brittany, a college freshman, and 8-year-old Breleigh. To date, her foundation has raised about $500,000. Part of the book's proceeds will go to the foundation. The book, "Don't Bet Against Me," released during breast-cancer-awareness month, not only details her battle with cancer but tells how she coped with other life challenges, including a pregnancy at age 19, single motherhood and a rocky relationship with Brett because of his addiction to prescription painkillers. Their Catholic faith was a key factor in Brett and Deanna's decision not to have an abortion when she became pregnant out of wedlock following her second year of college."We were always totally against (abortion)," she said, adding that putting their baby up for adoption was also not a consideration. Deanna said she "knew premarital sex was wrong, but for whatever reason" did it anyway. "I knew I would keep the baby," she said. Having Brittany meant that Deanna had to put her career goals on hold, but she said she was determined to do whatever she could to bring her up. During Deanna and Brett's on-again, off-again relationship during college and his early NFL career, Deanna said she often turned to prayer. The couple married in July 1996.

Today, Deanna describes her relationship with Brett as stronger than ever."All the stuff we've been through over the years has molded us into two different people. It's awesome to think where we started and where we are now," she said. "Our relationship has gotten to a much stronger point, a deeper love; we have so much respect and love for each other." "Brett is a completely different person and I can see the power of prayer in just that. It's changed our lives, our family." Deanna said she still prays for her husband for a lot of different reasons and in particular she prays for his protection on the football field each week.

at our Parish

Congratulations to Our English Language Students

We wish to thank South Florida Community College for providing a teacher and all of the necessary supplies to teach English to Spanish speaking people in our Parish. The Parish provided space in the education center three evenings each week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. The first session of classes concluded on Monday, December 17th. Classes will resume in January.

Congratulations also to our young second graders who celebrated First penance on Sunday, December 9, and a big "thank-you" to parents and teachers, Jackie Jackson and Robin Devlin.

Thank you: Doreen Pearlman and Michelle Roberts, teachers and students for sharing with us the true spirit and meaning of Christmas in the Christmas pageant last Sunday; all you wonderful parishioners for your scrumptious cookies and cupcakes; Jo Brenner and your spirited 6th grade students for a beautiful family Mass last Sunday; and Gene Ryan for your music.

Sacramental Life of the Parish

Baptisms:
Baptismal orientation is the first Sunday of each month. Ceremonies are performed on the second Sunday.

Marriages:
Adequate preparation is required. Call the parish office six months in advance.

Ministry to the Sick:
Arrangements can be made to have a priest and/or a Eucharistic minister visit on a regular basis, if necessary. Call the parish office.

Registration
Permanent and seasonal members are encouraged to register. Registration cards are available at the main church entrance.

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Charismatic Prayer Meeting

A prayer meeting is a weekly gathering to give praise, thanks, honor and glory to Jesus through song, prayer and teachings. Our purpose is to worship and honor God and to build up the Body of Christ as brothers and sisters in the faith. All are welcome to come and grow in love of Jesus and one another. We meet Sunday evenings at 6 p.m. in the Youth Center and begin with the Rosary. For more information contact Paul and Justine Devlin, 453-5327.

Readings for the Week of Dec. 23, 2007

Sunday
Isaiah 7:10-14
Romans 1:1-7
and Matthew 1:18-24

Monday
(Advent Weekday)
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Luke 1:67-79
(Christmas Vigil)
Isaiah 62: 1-5
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25
and Matthew 1:18-25

Christmas Day
Isaiah 52:7-10
Hebrews 1:1-6
and John 1:1-18

Wednesday
Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59
Matthew 10:17-22

Thursday
1 John 1:1-4
John 20:1a, 2-8

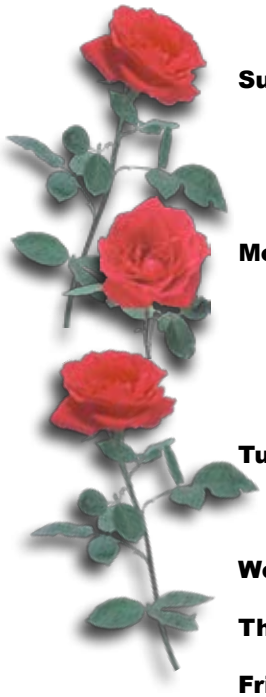
Friday
1 John 1:5—2:2
Matthew 2:13-18

Saturday
1 John 2:3-11
Luke 2:22-35

Next Sunday
Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14
Colossians 3:12-21
and Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Please Note: Names will be left on the prayer list for one month. If you would like a name to be kept longer on the list, please call the parish office.

Mass Intentions for The Coming Week



Saturday, Dec. 22
4 p.m. † Pat Holloway by his wife
† John Moviel by the Moviel family
† Gerald Renner by his Cousins
7 p.m. Mass in Spanish

Sunday, Dec. 23
8 a.m. † Richard & Roxanne Enoch by Ed & Lila Behal
† Kathleen McDonnell by Jack & Ann Kelly
10:15 a.m. † Wendell McKibben by Helen McKibben
† Bob Brown by Madeline Brown
† Judy Heiring by her mother

Monday, Dec. 24
8 a.m.
4 p.m. † David Laya by his mother
† Denise McKeon and George Voelker by Diann Voelker
5:30 p.m. † Margaret Molin by Rita Stull
† Manuel Gonzalez by Gabrielle Gonzalez
7 p.m. Mass in Spanish

Tuesday, Dec. 25
8 a.m. † Ray Deininger by Marian Deininger
† Carl McLennan by Alice McLennan
10:15 a.m. † Anna Lesniewski by Our Lady of Grace Guild

Wednesday, Dec. 26
8 a.m. † Gene Miltner by Jeanne Miltner

Thursday, Dec. 27
8 a.m. † Frank Connelly by Mike & Angie Heiring and family

Friday, Dec. 28
8 a.m. For our parish family

Saturday, Dec. 29
4 p.m. † Marie & Phillip Helfrich by Loretta Evans
† Joseph Verbitsky by Mary Ann Pastorella

Sunday, Dec. 30
8 a.m. † Kate Greene by family and friends
10:15 a.m. † Carl McLennan by the Knights of Columbus

Please Pray for...

Art Paek
Carol Neill
Joann Vanisacker
Noreen Buckley
Tyler Maxey
Charles Lindsey
Joan Roche
Melissa Clayton
Helen Dolan
Louis Bouchee

Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the
hour of our death.
Amen.

And Also for...

Those who care for the sick,
deceased members and benefactors of the parish,
and our loved ones.

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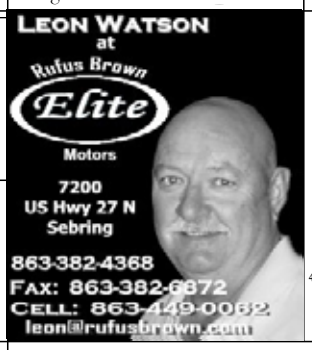

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Schedule of Masses and Prayers

Saturday
8 a.m. with Confession
at 8:30 a.m. (Nov. - May)
Vigil 4 p.m.
7 p.m. Spanish

Sunday
8 a.m. and 10:15 a.m.

Holy Days
Vigil 5:30 p.m.
8 a.m.

Daily Mass
Monday - Friday 8 a.m.

First Friday
Mass and Holy Hour
8 a.m.

First Saturday
Mass at 8 a.m.

Confessions
Saturday 3:30 p.m.

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. . . She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.'"