

Reflections and Prayers For West Virginia



Blackwater Falls

WV Tartan Plaid Design (front and back page)

The WV Tartan Plaid Design (front and back page) are adapted from the West Virginia Shawl tartan and adopted by the West Virginia senate (HCR #29) on March 6th, 2008. The colors have been chosen to represent the mountain state as follows: **red** for the Cardinal, the State bird; **yellow** for the Sugar Maple, the State tree; and the fall colors; **dark blue** for the mountain rivers and lakes; **black** for the Black Bear, the State animal, and coal and oil; **green** for the Rhododendron, the State Flower, and mountain meadows; **azure** for the sky above; and **white** to have all the colors of this great nation intertwined with the State of West Virginia. <http://wvstatemuseum.wv.gov/state-tartan.html>

The division pages are in the official West Virginia Colors of Old Gold and Blue.

The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Retreat and Training Center
1601 Virginia Street, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25311
304-345-0926

Website: www.wvis.org Email: wviscr@aol.com
Facebook: The West Virginia Institute for Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Sacred Heartedness is deeply rooted in Scripture. In the Old Testament, Sacred Heartedness is introduced as a way of deepening our relationship with God, dealing with others, and constructing the future. In the New Testament, Jesus models and teaches people what it means to live a Sacred Hearted way of life. Christ becomes our rock from whom living waters flow. In the Church Year, June is set aside for devotion to and deepening of our understanding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On June 20, 1863, West Virginia became the 35th State in the Union. “Mountaineers are always free” is our state motto. One of our most valued freedoms is freedom of religion. On June 20, 2018, West Virginia became the first state in US History to seek a Year of Prayer for our state.

“Almost” and “Heaven” are the first two words in the song, “Take Me Home Country Roads” written in August 1971 by John Denver, Taffy Nivert and Bill Canoff. This song became the fourth official West Virginia State Song in 2014.

In June 1999, the two words of “Almost” and “Heaven” became the title for the Almost Heaven Retreats held in Charleston, West Virginia. For 20 years, retreatants from all over the world have been coming to Charleston to experience an Almost Heaven Silent Retreat in the Mountain State.

Therefore, to deepen our understanding of Sacred Heartedness during June as Sacred Heart of Jesus Month; to conclude the Year of Prayer for West Virginia; and to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Almost Heaven Retreats, the 30 authors, who have contributed reflections for the Almost Heaven Reflections for West Virginia, invite you to join in a month of Prayer for West Virginia. Through the power of prayer, we recognize:

- ❖ God has blessed our state with abundant natural resources.
- ❖ God has called special people to live, work, and visit West Virginia.
- ❖ God’s love, mercy and grace will always see West Virginia through any and all challenges, our state may face.

By Susie Pace and Bob Harrison, Co-editors

SYMBOL-SCRIPTURE- STRUCTURE

Symbol and Scripture

Universally, the Sacred Heart of Jesus epitomizes God's love and mercy. Jesus teaches us about God's love and mercy through His words, thoughts, and deeds. Also, Jesus is the Rock from Whom living waters flow. Waterfalls are often used to symbolize the life-giving waters of Christ.

West Virginia adopted four, primary state symbols. Each of these state symbols are deeply rooted in Scripture about the role Christ should play in our state and our lives. These state symbols are as follows:

- ❖ The **Rhododendron**, the state flower, shows how Jesus often **CAUTIONS** us.
- ❖ The **Cardinal**, the state bird, reminds us of Christ's life-giving **VITALITY**.
- ❖ The **Sugar Maple**, the state tree, **BALANCES** God's love with God's mercy.
- ❖ The **Black Bear**, the state animal, embodies the **STRENGTH** Christ provides.

Each of the Daily Reflections are designed to integrate God's Word along with the authors thoughts, to suggest deeds that will not only benefit West Virginia but also our world.

Structure

The authors recognize that "Almost Heaven" is achieved by conscious contact with God on a daily basis through our words, thoughts, and deeds. These 30 reflections are primarily to be pondered and prayed through during the month of June within the following:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude-June 1

Caution-Theme One-June 2-8

Vitality-Theme Two-June 9-15

Balance-Theme Three-June 16-21

Strength-Theme Four-June 22-29

Postlude-June 30

AUTHORS

June	Author
1	Sister Carole Riley, CDP, Ph.D.
2	Sister Ritamary Schulz, ASCJ
3	Edward Kocher, Ph.D.
4	Bob Harrison
5	Christina St Clair, M.A.
6	Liz Deal, MFA
7	Reverend Rindy Trouteaud, Pastor
8	Sister Barbara Goodridge, O.S.F.
9	Cindy Neely, RN, MS
10	Elaine Soper, Ph.D.
11	Eileen Chwalibog BA
12	Kristen Krick
13	Tom Octave, MM
14	Father Bill Petro, M.A.
15	Sister Linda Hylla, CDP, LCSW
16	The Reverend Kent Higgins
17	Sister Mary Irene Sorber, SCC, MS
18	Dee Kochirka
19	James Owery
20	Former Governor Gaston Caperton
21	Margaret (Susie) Pace, M.Ed., M.A.
22	Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
23	Reverend Mr. Peter Minogue
24	Father J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.
25	Dustin and Bridgette Crites
26	Pam Steelhammer M.A., M.B.A
27	Michael J. Folio
28	Sister Gale Pankowski, SCC
29	Karen K. Bitonti Larry
30	Sister Molly Maloney, OSF, M.A.

June 1
We give thanks for West Virginia!

REFLECTION

Forty-two years ago, in 1977 I came to West Virginia yearning to make a difference with my life in a place that welcomed the gifts God gave me. Sixty years ago in 2019 I dedicated my life as a Sister of Divine Providence. West Virginia has become a ministerial home to me. I know and love the land, its native peoples and folks like me who settled from another area

As I pondered the three-fold purpose of this reflection booklet, I heard the state song echoing themes of the Almost Heaven Retreat exercises of St. Ignatius. The Ignatian exercises lead us to ‘freedom’ and alignment of my mind, heart and soul with God’s call to me at this point in time. To ponder the retreat theme of God’s love as exhibited in creation, and to be in the Switzerland of the United States, evoked a litany of thanksgiving for West Virginia. The Ignatian exercises call us into imitation and empathy with Christ, the one who Loves us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

To begin our spiritual tribute to West Virginia, pray with me this Litany of Thanksgiving for West Virginia and daily add your own word of Gratitude: (Please respond – we give you thanks for West Virginia.)

For the beauty of the mountains and hills,
For the plentiful rivers and streams,
For the glens and hollers,
For the original Indian settlers,
For the pluriformity of religious traditions,
For the birds especially the cardinal,
For the wild flowers, fruits, and trees,
For the state flowers,
For the musical heritage,
For the opportunity to give retreats at WVIS,
As we welcome the strangers,
As we welcome those born here,
For the opportunity to support the environmental crisis,
For the opportunity to support recovering addicts,
For the service of WV veterans in many conflicts and wars,
As we hope for the future of peace and justice,
With love for all who live and minister here,
For the love that motivates us all to be ‘kin’,

CAUTION

June 2-8



The state flower, RHODODENDRON, is a symbol of CAUTION.

June 2

“Lead me in your ways, Lord.” Psalm 25: 4

Heart of Jesus hear us!

REFLECTION

Attentiveness to God’s call for me is a lifelong matter. Have you even felt that you had the right answer, that you did not need anyone’s advice, and that you could make a simple decision quickly until it becomes a major issue? Being someone impulsive at times and at other times not responding quickly enough, I have discovered that while life seen as a pilgrimage can mean that I dive into the ocean of life and see where the waves carry me, or, as Mary Oliver says, ‘morning by morning the river is so cold and fresh and alive, and I still don’t jump in!’

How important it is for me to listen to His loving Heart and to include His urgings in all my decisions, and then to see where He carries me. My relationship with Christ cries for including Him, listening to Him, and acting from that contemplative heart. I trust that God’s plan for me will be revealed. if I include Christ in the day to day discernments, small or monumental. He so wants me to speak to Him about my life, my decisions, as well as all that is happening in the world around me. He does not want me to ‘go it alone.’ The love of His Heart is bursting with love for me, why would I not speak to the one who cares, who waits and so wants to be with me at every moment of my life?

Does he not say: *‘let Me participate in your journey, in your choices. Be with me. Let us communicate. Let us share the deepest relationship. I want only the good for you. I want to be a bigger part of your life. It is you whom I love, whom I care about, whom I will speak to in your heart’*. Can we say to Him as He said to the Father: *‘I put my life in Your hands?’*

PRAYER PRACTICE

1. Include God in all your decisions today. Speak to His loving Heart from your heart. Let Him love you. See Him looking at you and wanting the best for you.
2. Let His love fill your Heart by asking Him to be with you at every moment today.

Sr. Ritamary Schulz, ASCJ
Spiritual Director, WVIS
Hamden, CT

June 3

Almost Heaven Reflection for West Virginia

REFLECTION

Isaiah Chapter 61 offers a very upbeat and optimistic message to God's people. It seems fitting that we are inspired to pray for West Virginia in the month when its statehood was achieved and during a month of extraordinary natural beauty. The native Rhododendron, a strong yet delicate example of nature's beauty, offers comfort to the afflicted and those who mourn. The green leaved shrubs grow abundantly on the hillsides, holding soil and providing color year-round. Their lovely show of blossoms occurs in June, when the buds open to a delicate off-white tinged with pink. The blossoms offer a subtle sweet fragrance and are a magnet for bees. With good weather they will last a couple of weeks until they fade, drop, and begin to prepare for next June. When the air is mild and the blossoms are full and sweet, we may forget to seek God's guidance, but aha, when the cold wind blows and the leaves constrict, the Rhododendron hides under the snow, our shivering may inspire us to ask for Jesus' guidance.

PRAYER PRACTICE

For this prayer, the reader should look at a native Rhododendron in bloom. If you cannot find a living plant, find a good photo in a plant book or website. While admiring its beauty, we pray to remember that Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah thank God for proclaiming the good news to the poor, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. We pray to have gratitude for the good times, to remember that good times can be fleeting, and to continually seek God's guidance, whether the blossoms are sweet or frozen.

Edward Kocher, Ph.D.
Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit
Pittsburgh, PA
kocher@duq.edu

June 4

“Pray that I may lose myself in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

REFLECTION

This is a rather simple, yet life-changing, prayer of transformation and transplant written by Saint Mary Margaret Alacoque (1647-1690). Saint Margaret Mary is the saint most closely associated with devotion to the Sacred Heart.

What does devotion to the Sacred Heart entail? This devotion requires a total, gradual heart transplant only if we are willing to accept a deeper relationship with the donor.

According to the Old Testament Pentateuch or Torah, all are born with a Sacred Heart. As we grew up and from years of neglect, the muscles in the chambers of our heart have weakened. Our valves, arteries and veins have become clogged. God sends us Jesus and at his Baptism cautions us saying, “This is my Son, listen to him.”-Luke 9:35.

Jesus comes to offer us a new way of living and a transplanted Sacred Heart like his if we will only listen to him speaking to us. What is Sacred Heartedness? Sacred Heartedness is a lifestyle of service, love, sacrifice, devotion, healing, peacemaking, sorrow, laughter, joy, and community building. The Gospels provide us with examples of these attributes of Christ if we only read, heed, and put into action what he is teaching us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

June is the one month of the year, dedicated to Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as well as West Virginia Heritage Month. June is the last month of the fiscal year. In a sense, June is like an Advent Season for a New Year to come, not only for ourselves but our state, nation and world. Often simple prayers are the best prayers for defining moments and milestones like these in our lives, our communities, and the world.

Make the prayer of Saint Mary Margaret Alacoque your own today and the rest of your life by praying: “Pray that I may lose myself in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

or

Since the United States observance of Mother’s as well as Father’s Day originates in West Virginia, seek Sacred Heartedness in womanhood, manhood or community building in your prayers. this week.

Bob Harrison
Charleston, WV

DRBOBWV@AOL.COM

June 5

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?
Matthew 7: 3-4 (NIV)

REFLECTION

Can you tell the difference between the rhododendron and the mountain laurel? Both grow in West Virginia. The rhododendron is revered as the State Flower and is often showy, found in people's yards. The other is simpler and grows wild in mountainous areas. They are both from the heath family.

It is all too easy to impose our values on others. Jesus is clear that we need to work on our own perspective and not judge others. No matter our education or our accomplishments, we only ever have partial understanding. Only God sees the whole picture of human life with all of its complexities.

We can increase our spiritual understanding, though, and become more discriminating while at the same time remain a loving presence to those with whom we disagree. We are all from the same family and in God's eyes have value: the showy person is no better or worse than the simple soul.

PRAYER PRACTICE

What situation or person comes to your mind that makes you uncomfortable and takes away your peace?

Call upon Christ to help you get beyond your limited perspective to increase your understanding about yourself as well as about the other--so that you might become more empathetic.

Pray for the people of West Virginia who often have been called by the pejorative term of hillbillies, remembering that they are beloved by God who looks at each and every one of us with full understanding and loves us just as we are.

Christina St Clair, M.A., Spiritual Director Associate, WVVIS
Ashland, Kentucky,
Christinastclair55@yahoo.com
www.xyzwords.com

June 6

“May they all be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you.” John 17:21

REFLECTION

Today is the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Over 425,000 Allied and German troops were killed, wounded or went missing on this day in 1944. At least 38 of those, who died, were from West Virginia, more than 4,000 miles from that beach on the coast of France.

Before he died, Jesus prayed for unity. I wonder today about the relationship between unity and sacrifice. Can I be in Jesus, and can Jesus be in me, when I am completely full of myself? Can I be deeply connected to others when I see only my own needs?

“I in them and you in me.”

Today, I am halfway through my eighth Almost Heaven Retreat. One of the great gifts of moving to West Virginia has been finding this haven for my soul. For about a week each year, I give up the rest of my life to let God make space in me and help me see myself, my family, my work, my community, and the needs of the whole world in the context of God’s great love. What will God call me to this year?

PRAYER PRACTICE

Take a moment today and consider what Jesus may be inviting you to sacrifice for the sake of true unity. Maybe it is simply the need to be right or to have the last word. Maybe you are being called outside the familiar territory of your comfort zone to support others in their daily battles.

Liz Deal, MFA
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
Huntington, West Virginia
lizjdeal@gmail.com

June 7

“He has sent me...to comfort all who mourn.” Isaiah 61:1, 3

REFLECTION

The mountains hold our secrets. As I snake my way through the mountains of West Virginia, my car windows open in celebration of spring, the whispers of generations waft through my car. They linger momentarily, searching for a receptive heart to fill with their stories before being swept up in the warm air dancing over the earth’s majestic tectonic offering of granite and coal. I watch the ridge of bare-bone trees hugging the mountaintop sway under the weight of human emotions as these stories – some as brief as a desperate prayer - shinny up their spines before being released heavenward.

Moses, the greatest prophet who ever lived, loved the mountains. With more courage than any modern-day rock climber, he scaled a craggy mountainside enveloped in a thick fog to share the secrets of his heavy heart with the God whom he knew as the Great I Am. Deuteronomy ends with the Great I Am’s invitation to his friend for one last shared mountaintop experience. Moses, now 120 years old but with the knees of a teenager, climbs Mount Nebo for a panoramic view of the Promised Land, God’s gift to his weary chosen people. “I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there,” the Great I Am says to his earthly friend. Scripture tells us that Moses died on the mountaintop and that he was buried in a place that “no one knows to this day.” (Dt. 34:6)

Imagine yourself a witness to that divine-human conversation, that awe-filled, grief-tinged interchange between two friends who understood – maybe for the first time – the cost of Love. In the silence that followed, hear the haunting anguish of the Great I Am as he wandered the mountainside carrying the limp body of his dear friend searching for a final resting place far from curious human eyes. That place, the spot where God has come to mourn in private the loss of his dear ones throughout the ages, is the secret that the beautiful West Virginia mountains keep for a sister mountain.

PRAYER PRACTICE

In your mind’s eye, linger on a mountain mourning bench and offer the Great I Am your secret sorrows.

Rev. Rindy Trouteaud, Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church
Athens, Georgia

VITALITY

June 8-15



The state bird, **CARDINAL**, is a symbol of **VITALITY**.

June 8

“With complete assurance and without hindrance from anyone, he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Acts 28:31

REFLECTION

It is the month of June. The vibrancy of the rhododendron is beginning to fade. Its symbolic meaning of caution maintains its threat. Pentecost may or may not have arrived.

The disciples are huddled together hiding from the consequences of being followers of Jesus. They are frightened and spiritless.

A strong wind begins to fill the space where they are gathered. It is Pentecost. It is time to be open to the full force of the Holy Spirit. It is time to surrender to the life-giving vibrancy of the Spirit of God.

A radical transformation is taking place. Caution is cast to the winds of the Spirit. The Gospel is being proclaimed through the power of the Spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles: Chapter 28:31 reveals an image of how we can live free in God’s spirit. Paul is under house arrest and chained by his wrist to a Roman guard. Incredibly, “with complete assurance and without hindrance from anyone, he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ”.

In our world, many circumstances invite a radical response to proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. May the Spirit of God impel us to take these necessary risks.

PRAYER PRACTICES

Take time to quietly center yourself. Become aware of the Spirit of God breathing in you. As you inhale: Breathe in the Spirit of God. As you exhale: Breathe out God’s blessings upon our troubled world.

Reflect on the ways in which God is calling you to surrender to the vibrancy of the Spirit of God alive in you.

Sr. Barbara Goodridge, O.S.F.
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
Barbaragood1943@gmail.com

June 9

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me...He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted.” Isaiah 61:1

REFLECTION

My personal call is spiritual direction and spiritual directors do broken-hearted work.

When we enter into the story of Jesus' encountering the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, we experience his tending to the broken-heartedness of this woman. Longing for love and seeking security, the most basic of needs, she had sought men to fulfill those needs. In that time and place, it was an unmarried woman's only way, and this woman's heart had been broken many times. Most likely the first man had been her husband and put her aside. Her heart was armored with the accumulation of moments of so little mercy from others and so little mercy towards herself. Who could she trust? Who would love her? Who would provide for her?

Expecting to be ignored and dismissed as a Samaritan, she meets Jesus, and she experiences recognition, encounter, relationship and the felt sense of the living water already within her. Her heart was broken open by her encounter with Jesus. He knew her, and the life she was trapped in. He was merciful and accepting. Her healing was evident as she ran to proclaim the vital life within her that had been released.

We do the same for one another as soul care givers. E. E. Cummings wrote, “We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our touch, sacred to our touch.”

PRAYER PRACTICE

In quiet and solitude, be the Samaritan woman. Experience Jesus releasing in you the living water, the Christ deep within. Encounter one broken-hearted person today. Listen to their story and reflect to them their heart, and the promise of living water.

Cindy Neely RN MS

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director

Coordinator: Spiritual Direction Ministry St. Thomas More Community Chapel Hill, North Carolina

neelycynthia@gmail.com or 606-923-0437

June 10

“I press on toward the goal... for which God
has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14

REFLECTION

West Virginia separated from Virginia on June 20, 1863 and became the 35th state in the United States. But, WV’s history goes back much farther. Back to the various Native American tribes, the European explorations, and settlements. WV’s motto became “Mountaineers are always free.” And, it seemed, at every step, they were called to “press on... good and faithful servants.”

On June 20, 2018, WV became the first state in US History to seek a Year of Prayer for their state. Pressing on...

A Year of Prayer... What does this mean? How can we do this? We can start, by having a heart that is open to hearing God’s Will, which is unique for each us. And through acting on God’s Will in our daily/spiritual life and practices.

At this 20th anniversary of WVIS’s Almost Heaven Retreats, let’s think back over how WVIS has been teaching and offering assistance in developing ways to deepen our relationship with God through: training programs, workshops, retreats, and many other spiritual projects/ programs. By doing so, WVIS’s hands and feet, and hearts of Jesus have doubled, tripled, and quadrupled, not only in WV, but also stretching across the US and beyond.

In 10 days WV’s ‘Year of Prayer’ will conclude. Let us spend those days in prayer. But also, let’s be mindful that we need to follow God’s call to action.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Dear Jesus, I am so grateful to hear Your Voice in my head, even if it’s not every time I ask for it. Please help me be:

Silent enough to hear You,

Open enough to recognize that it is You, and

Focused enough to understand Your Guidance.

Help me to listen to You more often. And, thank You for all Your Graces and Blessings. Amen.

Elaine Soper, PhD
Ronceverte, WV

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director
elainesoper@gmail.com

June 11

“I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.”

Jn.10:10

REFLECTION

When my family arrived in Huntington, West Virginia in January of 1996, following God’s call to move for the 16th time, I became a stranger living in a strange land. I identified with the Israelites wandering in the desert, far from what was familiar. My oasis was the Marshall Newman Center which introduced me to the path by which God would lead me. The manna provided came in the form of community, Spiritual Direction, Almost Heaven Silent Retreats, and WVIS.

West Virginia has been the place of God’s healing in my life, full of the grace of the mountains, the rivers, and the companions who have been walking with me on the spiritual path. For twenty years I have been attending Almost Heaven retreats where “heart surgery” has been performed more than once. Psalm 51: 10 prays, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” This spiritual journey is a return to one’s heart, a reconnection with the inner core, the true self where Father, Son, and Spirit has made their home, our hearts united and immersed in the flow of divine love, in and through each of us. This Divine Flow is the Vitality that courses through the ebb and flow of our lives, the stream of love and mercy that pours from the heart of Jesus that heals, forgives, lifts up, and revitalizes us as we journey on in living an abundant life.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Journal

1. What/where in WV brings you fullness of life (abundance)?
2. Who are the people who have been your spiritual companions?
3. What gifts have you received from them?
4. Have there been times when God performed “heart surgery” on you? Describe.
5. Pray for healing and abundant life for West Virginia and its people.

Eileen Chwalibog BA
WVIS Associate Spiritual Director

June 12

“For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive.”

D.H. Lawrence

REFLECTION

When was the last time you felt vividly and perfectly alive? In a culture cluttered with screens, where text messages and tweets masquerade as conversation and the value of an image or idea is measured in “likes”, authentic living is a challenge. Yet authentic living is the calling of all those who follow Jesus Christ.

Through his death on the cross, Jesus not only offers us eternal life, but abundant life as well. When we abide in Christ and allow his spirit to fill us, we live lives full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In Christ, and in Christ alone, we are vividly and perfectly alive!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Think about the things to which you are connected. Do these things draw you closer to Christ or do they isolate you? Ask God to show you all the ways you can connect more deeply with him and, in turn, with others.

“Fast” from technology and social media for a day. Spend some time out of doors and ask God to reveal himself through his creation.

June 13

Jesus: the source of our vitality.

REFLECTION

A priest arose on Easter Sunday. Between a transfer; new configuration of the diocese, where had ministered for over forty years; familial deaths, and a parish that needed lots of pastoral care, he had a whirlwind of six months that was anything but calm.

As these challenges came, he never lost his firm foundation in the love God had for him, the church, the people of God and the mission that Christ had called him to. The church was full, and the liturgy had reached the moment for his homily.

“Always be on the lookout for signs of resurrection!” Not exactly what the assembly gathered thought they might hear. As the priest continued, he offered examples of signs of the resurrection he had witnessed in his life, even though the rhythm of life as he knew it had changed dramatically for him. The signs of the resurrection that he gave witness to in his homily were all rooted in the faith that Jesus is the source of life and abundant life for all.

When we find signs of resurrection all around us, such as estranged friends finding reconciliation, families gathering faithfully throughout the year to celebrate milestones of life together, doors being opened in welcome that were once closed, and hardened hearts changing, we have witnessed signs of the resurrection too.

Resurrection is a sign of vitality, a sign that is rooted in Jesus, who offers us a life that is full of meaning and the promise of eternal life with him forever. Jesus asks us to stay connected to him throughout our life as he is the way, the truth, and the life! By choosing to be on the lookout for signs of resurrection, we celebrate and witness to the vitality of Jesus in our lives and in our world.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Today, look for signs of resurrection in your life and in the life of the world? How do these signs give witness to Jesus as the source of our vitality?

Pray that your life might be a witness to the vitality and abundant life of Jesus.

Thomas Octave, MM
Saint Vincent College, Latrobe PA
Director of Sacred Music, Diocese of Greensburg

June 14

**“Practicing Resurrection in Crucified places”
The Telling Takes Us Home: A People’s Pastoral, p.42**

REFLECTION

When President Johnson initiated the “War on Poverty”, in 1964, he opened the flood gates for a new vitality to pour into Appalachia. Many volunteers flooded the region, especially West Virginia, to make a difference in the quality of life. They brought vitality and Appalachia offered them a new vitality in service, which continues to today. The culture and social needs changed some and they stayed, making West Virginia their home. As they listened to people’s stories, the seeds of truth, friendship, belonging sprouted and grew a harvest. Stories growing from the shared experiences of mountaineers are a vital resource for building vital community and family.

With the advice: “Listen to the Spirit as it speaks to you in the lives of the people”. I arrived in 1981, to pastor the people of Belle/Coalburg/East Bank and Cabin Creek Hollow. God called in the needs of the hungry, those needing clothing, and the imprisoned in poverty. The great diversity of people was revealed. All tied together by land with its wealth of natural resources, especially coal; tied together also by the struggle to make family life survive and flourish, tied together by the struggle for justice.

In my weariness, in forests and parks I listened to the Spirit as it spoke to me in creation, renewing my vitality.

Introduced to the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA), we listened to the Spirit as it spoke to us in the Churches. After listening to stories of the people, ministers and volunteers, the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia wrote two pastoral letters that gave vision to the mission, enabling us to practice “Resurrection in Crucified places”.

1. “THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME”, (1975), A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia.
2. “AT HOME IN THE WEB OF LIFE” (1995), a Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities.
3. “THE TELLING TAKES US HOME” (2007), Taking Our Place in the Stories That Shape us. A People’s Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Consider reading one of these pastoral letters.

Father Bill Petro, M.A.
Associate Spiritual Director

Frbpetro42@gmail.com
Dunbar, WV

June 15

"I will play before the Lord
I will sing to Him my melody
Stand among His people here
Telling of all His ways....
Sing People of God
Bless His Holy Name
Offering Him our Joyful hearts
Joining in Endless praise"...Bob Dufford, SJ

REFLECTION

Jesus is the source of our vitality through play, creativity and relationship. In Psalm 104, David gives praise for God's playful creative force, and it is clear that God's creation was part of the playful experience. To create empowers us and sustains us with life giving energy. To create is going to the edges and trusting the process. Music, art, dance are all forms of the prayerful and playful experience and generate vitality within our being. Play is a mood altering experience that allows the body to heal itself. Yet, we as adults add on new responsibility and the balance of work and play become a challenge. If God plays, then where do we get the notion that play is just for children or that adults who make time for play and enjoy it are immature? What is your definition and beliefs around play?

Offering our joyful hearts to the Lord requires that we become grateful for all that is part of our lives and to trust that God who created us for the good will use our experiences to bring about lessons for quality living. Willingness to trust that God will use our experiences to transform our lives is do God's will. Doing God's will is a harmonious way of being in relationship with the Creator who created us through Play.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Play before God

Take a Sabbath Day and recreate yourself. Find what makes you energized and happy and mindfully take pleasure before God.

Sr. Linda Hylla, CDP, LCSW
Affiliate and Friend of WVIS
Granite City, IL.
srlindahylla@hotmail.com

BALANCE

June 16-22



The state tree, SUGAR MAPLE, is a symbol BALANCE.

June 16

“Everything will be all right in the end. If it’s not all right, it’s not the end.” - Sonny in The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel.

REFLECTION

Fayetteville was a quiet place when I was young. The court house was our industry. Maple Avenue was lined with attractive homes. There was one hotel, and it had been closed for years – “under renovation.” And it was just fine.

Fayetteville is less quiet today. There are new hotels, rafting guides, and an amazing bridge spanning the New River – all the realization of dreams. The town is different, and it is just fine.

Hinton was a boom town in my youth. The railroad provided good jobs. The McCreery Hotel was known as a good place to stay. In 1952, those shops closed, and Hinton began a gradual decline.

Hinton today is rebuilding, largely to fulfill the dream of one man who wants his hometown to live again. The McCreery Hotel has been renovated. The movie theatre has reopened. Not there yet, but moving.

Dreams are a necessary precursor to actions. People fulfilled their dreams in Fayetteville and Hinton. Pray for people with dreams.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Watch the movie The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. It tells the stories of several people’s dreams, but principally those of Sonny, who dreams of perfecting his run-down hotel. One hotel guest complains that she wants the hotel room that was pictured in his brochure, but that room does not yet exist. Sonny says: “Everything will be all right in the end. If it’s not all right, then it’s not the end.”

Can we see the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel as a metaphor for West Virginia? Pray for the patience to let our state be as it is today and for dreamers with the will to make it better, knowing that, in the end, all things are all right.

The Rev. Kent Higgins, retired Episcopal priest
Former WVIS board member revkenthiggins@gmail.com

June 17

“Intentionally holistic, interdependent lives that balance prayer, community, ministry and Sabbath, foster healthy relationships and give countercultural witness”.

A Commitment to God and Humanity by the Sisters of Christian Charity
of the NA Eastern Province 15th Provincial Chapter

REFLECTION

“Intentionality” is the key to leading a balanced life. The desire to live this balance in life is very appealing. Desiring to become whole is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching and life for us. Everything in our world seeks this balance...from the gorgeous mountains of West Virginia that hold and held the livelihood of most of the residents here to the beautiful rivers, streams, wildlife and natural flowers, herbs, trees, and the coal mines. If we but open our eyes as we look at this beauty, we can almost touch the sacredness of this place. With the intentionality of seeing with eyes and heart, we can see God as the Supreme Being or whatever name we give the Creator of us all. So what does all this beauty and, at times, even struggle teach us?

Indispensable to wholeness and balance is contemplation of the One who creates. Seeing with the eyes of the heart will view the dying of fall into winter as the life-sap buries itself in the ground of security and protection; then the new life of spring into summer as we witness the re-creation back to radiant beauty. And in our lives...the darkness of sorrow, struggle into the joy of new life around us and within us. It is with intentionality, the drive within each of us, that seeks balance in our everyday lives.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Ponder and pray through the following questions:

- What drives you to do what you love most?
- What do you envision as the goal of your life?
- If your heart is calling you to intentional balance in your life, who or what will you seek to help you to find your path?
- Have you considered making a retreat or scheduling spiritual direction through a retreat center such as the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality?

Sister Mary Irene Sorber, SCC, MS
WVIS Itinerant Spiritual Director
Mendham, New Jersey

June 18

“Be still and know that I am God”

Psalm 46:10

REFLECTION

Balance is something that is difficult to obtain in our modern technologically demanding culture. Many people turn to social media as a lifestyle (86% of all Americans start their day on their cell phones and/or computers). Our need to jump every time we hear a beep or click from our little machines increases anxiety contributing to a state of mind that scientists refer to as “red mind” or a stressed mind. Prolonged periods of stress can turn into a “grey mind” (As fire burns to ashes).

Burnout can be prevented if we learn to achieve balance in our response to daily stresses and achieve an attitude that is calm, still and in the moment. Some people have turned to yoga, meditation, and deep breathing techniques to reduce the brain-chatter. Others find these practices too difficult. One of the easiest ways to achieve a calm “blue” state of mind is to spend time near water.

Scientists have discovered that water calms the mind and restores us to a oneness with nature; reconnecting us to God’s creation. When we engage our five senses by playing or just being near water, it allows us to “let go” and be present in the moment. Fortunately, there are plenty of streams, lakes and rivers in West Virginia. Whenever I’m on retreat at WVIS, I take time daily to walk along the Kanawha River and just let my mind “flow with the stream”. Just being in that moment and not having “to do” something restores my soul, and I regain balance.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Take time each day to play or walk along a waterway and allow yourself to feel God’s presence in that moment.

Dee Kochirka

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director intern

Deekochirka@gmail.com

June 19

“The Eve of Statehood”

REFLECTION

When recalling Abraham Lincoln, we often picture him issuing the Emancipation Proclamation or declaring statehood for West Virginia. Naturally, these watershed moments quickly come to mind. In reality, he was a deeply contemplative person, perhaps faced with as many challenges prior to his Presidency as during it. The leader we remember as an attorney and statesman was also a clerk and a rail splitter. Imagine the presence of mind, the confidence sowed from doubt, required to name a leadership team comprised primarily of one's rivals. What now seems intuitive would have been remarkable to witness at the time.

While not a perfect parallel, perhaps we see comparison in Jesus' calling of the Apostles. A group that included fishermen also included a tax collector. Progress towards devotion and faith was often beset by episodes of doubt. We recall Peter stumbling into the water in the Sea of Galilee. We remember Thomas wanting to see the nail marks. These are human moments of flawed individuals, but individuals nonetheless progressing along a faith journey. Jesus was no doubt aware of their shortcomings, and yet saw them as vital to the establishment and growth of his Church.

Reflect upon Ephesians 1:18. *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people.*

PRAYER PRACTICE

Modern society has a fixation with desired outcomes. Additionally, we've been conditioned to assess and judge the merits of others. **Rather, take time this year to refocus.** Prayerfully consider the following:

- What aspects of my faith formation need reaffirmed?
- How may I be a plus—a net contributor—to those around me?
- What can I do to better serve my community and State?

James Owrey
Mercer/McDowell county native
Charleston resident

June 20

“Montani Semper Liberi”

(Latin for “Mountaineers are always free!”)

REFLECTION

Birthdays are a time of celebration. On birthdays, families gather to celebrate the past, the present, and the future of the honoree. June 20 of each year is the day we celebrate the birthday of West Virginia.

On June 20, we honor the people, the places, the events and the abundant resources that exist in our great state. We look at where our state was and where our state is. We should also use our state’s birthday to ask God to guide us as we seek God’s vision for our future.

As our motto suggests, we have unparalleled freedoms in this state. We have lands where we are free to roam as well as responsibly develop. We have resources that remain unharnessed, and yet to be tapped. We have talented people who have the potential to shape a new vision for our state. In short, we need to go to our respective mountain tops or places of prayer to ask for God’s greater guidance for us.

As our motto further suggests, we should not limit ourselves in our prayers for our state, the nation and the world to just one day. We should be ever mindful that we are always free to pray.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Prayer is a way of taking a daily personal inventory of where we were, where we are and where we want God to lead us. Our relationship with God is not just about us. Our relationship with God is designed to seek where God is calling us to serve. During your prayer time with this reflection, ask God to show you where God wants to direct and use you to be of greater service to not only West Virginia, this nation, but also in our world.

Former Governor Gaston Caperton

31st Governor of West Virginia from 1989-1997

A Friend of WVIS

Charleston, West Virginia

June 21 Summer Solstice

“I delight greatly in the Lord: ... For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow...” Isaiah 61:10,11

REFLECTION

I find in nature a closeness to God. When I see the beauty of West Virginia's natural resources I do feel it is 'Almost Heaven' – the majestic mountains, the flowing streams, the flowering plants, nature being born and reborn. Returning from trips outside the state, the first glimpse of the majestic mountains always calls me home.

Today marks the Summer Solstice – giving us long days, early dawns, late sunsets, short nights. The Summer and Winter Solstice's give nature the balance needed for growth and for rest – providing us the beauty of our West Virginia landscape. During bright sunny days of Summer we reap the benefits of the summer solstice. Whether on the many walking the trails of the state parks, climbing the hills and valleys near flowing streams, enjoying or picking flowers, vegetables, fruit or just sitting in beautiful gardens – on your porch – under a tree. We can see and feel the beauty God in his bounty has given us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Spend some time outside today. Take a leisurely stroll, find a quiet spot to sit, or take a drive through the countryside. Record what you see, smell, hear, feel, taste – how are you delighting in the Lord today?

In appreciation for the summer solstice, tonight take time today to pray:

As we celebrate this solstice feast,
open our eyes to the countless wonders
and to the sparks of fire-life that you have planted in each of us.
May this holy and magical night
be aglow with star-fire and God-light
as we once again begin the sacred season of summer.
Amen. (Edward Hays, Planetary Pilgrim)

Margaret (Susie) Pace
Princeton, WV
topsy@suddenlink.net

June 22

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” -Philippians 4:12-13.

REFLECTION

Beginning on June 22, and concluding on June 23, 1944, Tornadoes ravaged six counties in Northern West Virginia, killing 103 people and injuring 430 others. Along with the loss of lives, extensive property damage was recorded, according to an article written by Meredith Sue Willis that is included in the **West Virginia Encyclopedia**.

Catastrophic disasters, such as tornadoes, remind us just exactly how dependent we are on God who is our source of strength through our triumph and trials in life.

Tornadoes are ranked by meteorologists between ONE-FIVE with a FIVE being the most severe. Tornadoes are rare in the Mountain State, yet meteorologists ranked these West Virginia Tornadoes as a “FOUR” to further demonstrate the destructive levels of these rare weather phenomena.

No matter what happens in our lives, God is in control and always with us.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Think of a time when you needed the strength to face a “Tornado-like Situation” in your life.
- Take that memory with you in prayer and see how God strengthened you during this “Tornado.”
- Give thanks now to God for God’s goodness for giving you strength then and the confidence you will need to face future “Tornadoes” when these occur in your life.
- Conclude by either reading the lyrics, singing, or listening to a recording of **“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”** by lyricist Civillia D. Martin and composer Charles H. Gabriel.

Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
First Baptist Church Volunteer
Charleston, WV
Venable40@AOL.COM

STRENGTH

June 23-29



The state animal, **BLACK BEAR**, is a symbol of **STRENGTH**.

June 23
“The Holy Spirit in the Wind”

REFLECTION

The wind roars along the sixty-mile length of Peters Mountain in Southern West Virginia, and it often sounds like the Atlantic Ocean, with waves crashing among the craggy cliffs. In the Gospel of John 3:8, Jesus says,” The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

In this land called “Almost Heaven” we have an abundance of the Holy Spirit blowing across our mountain tops as a reminder that we are not in control of our own destiny. However, through the act of contemplative prayer and opening our hearts up to the Holy Spirit, our lives may be infused with God’s grace, and the Holy Spirit may take us places we never dreamed.

While living in France, the former British Naval Officer, Jean Vanier, who died recently, was filled with the Holy Spirit. He invited two disabled men to come and live with him. It soon blossomed into L’Arche, a series of 150 homes around the world, where the disadvantaged could live their lives in dignity. When the wind blows and the seeds are planted, sometimes in a very small way, the results are often beyond our imagining.

PRAYER PRACTICE

So, live without fear, for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that God may take you places beyond your comprehension. Regardless of the mistakes of the past, engage in contemplative prayer, open your heart, so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit. As Saint Pope John Paul II often said, “Duc in Altum.” Put out into the deep and lower your nets. Go out into the unknown and explore a mystery!

Rev. Mr. Peter Minogue
Saint Patrick Church
Hinton, WV

June 24

The Birth of John the Baptist

“I am not he!” (*cf. Acts 13:22-26*)

REFLECTION

What a relief for John the Baptist – and for me! Today is his birthday; and his gift to us (as Paul states in today’s second reading) is a reminder that he is not the Messiah – and I’m not either. That calling was given to someone else: Jesus, the Anointed One, the true Messiah. I can almost feel the weight being taken off my shoulders!

Well then, what was John called to do? And just as important: what am I called to do? The answer is the same for both: prepare the way of the Lord. Point the way to Jesus. And remember that “I am not he.”

But how to do it? Probably not the same way John did it. Honey is great – but I may not be crazy about eating locusts! Instead I must listen for that small, still voice of God (*perhaps during a retreat at WVIS?*) to learn how I am called to be the bridegroom’s friend at this moment of my life. Whatever I am called to do will likely include, as it did for John, decreasing, so that the real Messiah might increase. In that way John and I both are called to be thoroughly counter-cultural, truly a voice crying in the wilderness.

The more I am willing and able to live that call, the more I will be revealing and reflecting the light of Christ in whatever I do, for whomever I do it. What a blessing, for West Virginia or wherever I may be!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Breathe deeply. As I exhale, let that be a sign of my desire to let go of any attempt to be a Messiah. And as I inhale, let that ready me to prepare the way of the Lord today.

Fr. J. Patrick Foley, Ph.D.

Retreat Ministry – Parish Missions

WVIS Associate Spiritual Director

frjpf@sbcglobal.net

www.itinerantpapistpreacher.com

June 25
“Paws to Reflect”

REFLECTION

In the beginning God created Earth and ALL living creatures that shall roam upon it. As the bible states in Genesis 1:26, God gave humans dominion over these creatures. This means preservation of their lives and the habit in which they thrive.

One of our favorite places in the Mountain State is the West Virginia State Wildlife Center. This facility has been in existence since 1923, allowing native animals to live protected amongst humans so we may learn more about them. In doing so, we have discovered the vital role these animals each play within our ecosystem while bonding with them individually.

In addition to wildlife preservation and rehabilitation, one must also cherish domestic and all too often, the neglected farm animals. Caring for the sick, malnourished and injured creatures in any setting is not easy work, but it is God’s work.

When asked how we continue on the hard days, the strength from God (Philippians 4:13) is acknowledged along with the need to make a difference. Some days that difference could be in the life of a forgotten roadside kitten or one orphaned black bear cub. Within our beautiful state, there are so many rescue and rehabilitation organizations that strive to make a difference. Within the borders of West Virginia we have: Point of View Farms, Hillsboro; New Hope Animal Rescue, Hurricane; Three Rivers Avian Center, Brooks and Itty Bitty Kitty Committee, Charleston. There is no earthly love like what animals have for humans. Animals deserve life. If not, why did God command Noah to build an Ark as in Genesis 7:1-3 to spare them? We feel as though all are placed on the path that allows us to serve God and his creatures.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Our prayer for you, as you read this reflection, that you too would give thought to volunteering, donating, fostering, adopting and/or networking. Tending to God’s flock will not only change the animals’ lives but yours as well.

Dustin and Bridgette Crites
Elkview, West Virginia

June 26

“Politics is the Art of the Possible”

Otto Van Bismark

REFLECTION

In a recent poll, participants were asked (using a scale of 0 to 100) how close they thought the country is to civil war?

The results showed that the opinion of the American people is that our country is 70% on the way to a civil war-70%- Seventy!

Civil war. Brother against sister. Neighbor against neighbor. Viewers of this news network against viewers of that news network.

Why?

Because we use a person’s political reactions to judge the whole person?

Because we have convinced ourselves people who are different in thought or character than us are ‘The Dangerous Other?’ Because we have forgotten

that all people, even ‘The Dangerous Others deserve respect? Because we

have forgotten that all people, even ‘The Dangerous Others deserve love?

Because we have forgotten that even ‘The Dangerous Others are willing to love and comfort us? Because instead of civilly discussing public policy we

hatefully discuss politicians?

“Be the change you want to see in the world”

Gandhi

We must ALL actively work toward healing the divide between ‘us’ and ‘The Dangerous Other.’ And we have to do it NOW.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Are you able to honestly differentiate between your opinion of a policy and your reaction to the politician? Are you willing to honestly differentiate between your opinion of a policy and your reaction to the politician?

Are you able to do a little research and become more informed about a policy or an issue? Are you willing to do a little research and become more informed about a policy or an issue?

Are you willing to pray for love and blessings for ‘The Dangerous Other?’

Are you willing to ask Jesus for the strength to do what needs to be done to heal the hostility in our country and our state?

“All You Need is Love”

Sir Paul McCartney

Pam Steelhammer M.A., M.B.A

psteelhammer@gmail.com

June 27

“Acquire the peace of Christ in your heart, and a thousand souls around you will be saved.”

-St. Seraphim, Russian Orthodox Saint

REFLECTION

Hidden in the hills of Wayne, West Virginia is a beautiful monastic treasure. A community of 28 Russian Orthodox monks, the Hermitage of the Holy Cross is a place of peace and a home of spiritual strength. Over 2,000 pilgrims journey each year to the Hermitage.

Monks and pilgrims join in *ora et labora* (prayer and work) to celebrate Christ and share in the gift of God’s creation. Daily prayer and Divine Liturgy complement the daily tasks of toiling in gardens, tending to goats, and laboring at the refractory and monastic buildings.

At the Hermitage, prayer and work not only fulfill our calling as Christians but mirror the values of West Virginians. Through prayer, we promote our work, and through work we strengthen our prayer. For me, as my aging knees ached and my arms struggled lifting a weighty pitch fork of refuse cleaning the Hermitage’s goat barn, I recalled the values of selflessness and hard work ingrained in West Virginia’s cultural fabric and reflected on St. Seraphim’s wisdom.

Let us acquire the peace of Christ in our hearts through our toils and our talents and become a mirror of Christ’s love. Christ’s peace abounds at the Hermitage, in our work, and in our travails. I pray that we as West Virginians acquire the peace of Christ and radiate Christ’s peace through our *ora et labora*.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- * How is God calling you to acquire Christ’s peace in your heart?
- * What conflict keeps you from acquiring Christ’s peace?

Michael J. Folio

Attorney

michaelfolio@yahoo.com

June 28

“The spirit of the LORD is upon me, for I am anointed and sent to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken.”

Isaiah 61: 1-2

REFLECTION

As I pray over the words, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, I am overwhelmed by the super abundance of love Jesus has for me. He has given me life. Jesus is the one who strengthens me and gives me HIS courage and strength. Each morning I awake to a new day full of blessings and adventure if I but open my eyes to see. There are times when it is a struggle to see the goodness and the blessings. It is in those times that Jesus is so present and so alive. It is Jesus who gives me the strength.

Can I believe these words? Can I overcome the spirit that drags me down to see only the negative? If I can answer maybe or I think so, or I will try, I am opening myself to the blessings of Jesus. Can I be brave to do so?

The Lord is calling ME to bring the glad tidings to those afflicted, down and out, and discouraged. The good news of Jesus' love, care and concern for me and for everyone who lives on this earth with me.

Recently we all viewed the destruction of the magnificent Notre Dame Cathedral! More amazing is the outpouring of ALL people to repair/rebuild the church! This is the spirit alive! This is the church we are all called to be a part.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for I am anointed to bring glad tidings to the afflicted! In his strength I can do all things.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Tomorrow morning when I awake I will be grateful for the gift of my life and this beautiful world I live in with all God's people.

I will be positive about how Jesus is working in and through me to make a better world.

Sister Gale Pankowski, SCC

Chaplain at Saint Barnabas Medical Center, Livingston, NJ

srgale1006@aol.com

June 29

“... what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

“For I was hungry...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:35-40

“...faith without works is dead.” James 2:26

REFLECTION

God asks us to “do” throughout the Bible. “Do” is an action verb that tells us to perform something, to achieve or complete something, to act or behave in a specified way (from Smart Lookup, MacOS Mojave). These definitions emphasize the doing, not the thinking about, not the considering, not the planning, not the projecting!

The cited Biblical references clearly direct us to DO justice, to LOVE goodness, to WALK with God. Further we are told to DO all of these for those in need. Finally, we are told without WORKS our faith is dead.

Pretty powerful directions from God! How do we apply these directions from our God? Do we sit back when something needs done and say, “Oh, not today. I’m too busy”? Or do we say, “Oh, certainly God needs someone smarter, stronger, more understanding, more compassionate, more informed”? What does it take to make us say, “Here I am Lord! I will do this!”?

God gives us the strength to respond to all His directives with “Here I am Lord! I will do this!” Our strength comes through our regular prayer life, through knowing we are following God’s directives, and through knowing that strength comes from regular practice!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Seek out a local person or entity (someone from church/town/neighborhood, nonprofit organization, community or civic organization, volunteer group) needing a helping hand. Listen for calls for help from that person or from that entity. Then DO what is needed! People know we are people of faith by our actions!

Karen K. Bitonti Larry
Philippi, WV
karenklarry@gmail.com

June 30

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help”

Psalm 121

REFLECTION

It’s almost impossible to put into words the relationship, the bond, the connectivity one can develop with “the WEST Virginia hills.” Whether you have grown up amidst them or a new comer to our State, like God, they are a constant, abiding presence.

Whether traveling in any direction, in our State, the hills, in each season are mesmerizing. In autumn, the array of colors of the trees on the hillsides is simply breathtaking. Only in winter, when the trees are bare, the beautiful shape and outline of the hills emerge. In the summer, especially after a storm, your eyes are drawn to the mist nestling above the hollows of the hills. In the spring, you see a lovely green hue on the hillsides as trees are poised for their branches to burst into new life.

As in my childhood, I have a great love for our Mountain State. When I am traveling our “country roads”, savoring the mountainous landscape, the lyrics from “The WEST Virginia Hills automatically begins to sing and pray within me.

“Oh, the WEST Virginia hills, how majestic and how grand, with their summits bathed in glory like our Prince Emmanuel’s land, is it any wonder then that my heart with rapture fills, as I stand once more with loved ones on those WEST Virginia Hills?”

What is it about the hills that speaks to our hearts? Mountains and hillsides have the power to evoke many feelings within us: strength, comfort, perspective, stability, solitude, gratitude, oneness with creation, a call to quiet contemplation, hope! Is it any wonder, that for the past 20 years, retreatants return each year to come to our “Almost Heaven”, WEST Virginia retreat? WVIS, a special place, where retreatants find God, solace and solitude among the WEST Virginia hills!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Using Lectio Divina, spend time praying with Psalm 121

- Pray that our State leaders find balance among employment for our WV Miners and protection and ecological stewardship of our beautiful mountains
- Pray that the State of West Virginia continues to be a place of hospitality, equality and respect for those who live here and those who simply pass through these hills

Sr. Molly Maloney, OSF, M.A., Spiritual Director, wvissrmolly@aol.com



Cathedral Falls