



Pastoral Letter: A Time of Renewed Faith

December 3, 2023
First Sunday of Advent

My dear People of God,

"I believe in one God." We profess this belief at every Mass and special occasion. Do we ever pause to consider what those words mean?

This profession of faith in God, the Creator of all, begins the Nicene Creed, which was adopted by the First Council of Nicaea in 325. It summarizes the essentials of what we, as Catholics and Christians, believe. We call the Creed a Profession of Faith because it expresses the fundamentals of Christian belief. The Creed is organized around the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It teaches the fundamental truths that God is the origin of all, that He fully revealed Himself and saved us through His Son, and that His saving work continues through the Holy Spirit in the Church.

The Creed cannot be simply a matter of words or a formula we recite. The Creed is a Profession of Faith, where we openly and publicly witness to the community and the world that we believe in God and all that He reveals. The act of faith, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "is man's answer to God's Revelation that is made known and expresses his plan of love; to use an Augustinian expression, it is letting oneself be grasped by the Truth that is God, a Truth that is love" (The Transforming Power of Faith, Ignatius Press, 2013, p. 53).

Beginning this Advent, I am asking the faithful of the Diocese of Lake Charles to renew their faith as found in the Creed. This reaffirmation of the faith will continue through the Easter Octave and conclude with Divine Mercy Sunday in 2024. Over these five months, your pastors will assist you through their preaching and teaching to understand better the articles of faith contained in the Creed and we will all strive once again to be "grasped by the Truth that is God."

Being "grasped" by God implies that faith is a gift. God reaches out, just as the giver of any gift does to the recipient. In turn, we must respond, as a good recipient, to the Giver. This response is both a question of knowledge and affection. To be grasped by God is never just one or the other. We know this from human experience. We love more what we know better. Love at first can seem to be an attraction alone, but love searches for knowledge of the beloved. Learning more about the beloved deepens faith and heartfelt devotion.

How does God reach out to us? Here are a few examples: in parents sharing their faith in God with their children; in spouses who take seriously their marriage vows; in teachers who love their students by teaching them the faith through word and example; in pastors who tend their flocks; in everyone who witnesses to holiness. Each shares in God's outreach to the other, in His "grasp" of the believer. And let us not forget the "grasp" that comes no less personally through other means: the experience of tragedy; an encounter with overwhelming beauty; reading a book or attending a retreat that changes our lives; a truth that penetrates doubt. Someone will approach a priest and say, "Father, I remember something you said in a homily years ago that changed my life." Or a young adult will come to a teacher of long ago and express gratitude by saying, "I want to thank you for seeing something in me that I didn't see in myself." Or someone will share with others, "I am a better Christian today because my grandmother took the time to rescue me from my bad habits."

In each of these examples, someone believed in God and put his or her faith into action. This faith, this gift from God, was mediated by love. For what "grasps" more intensely than love? I recall someone sharing with me, "I wish I had faith." I pointed out to this person that this simple sentence was itself a prayer. God was already reaching out in love. All that was needed was acceptance of the gift. The flame of faith had already been ignited.

One of the great tragedies in our modern world is that faith has grown cold. However, one might ask, "Is it our faith or is it our loving response to faith that has grown cold?" I recall the words of our Lord's prophecy: "Many false prophets will arise and deceive many; and because of the increase of evildoing, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:11-12). That the presence of falsehood and the absence of love appear together is no accident.

When love grows cold, it is usually because people have embraced falsehood. What is so sad is that it need not be this way. God is still extending His "grasp." God does not tire of reaching out with His Grace. The question to be asked is, where is our loving response? Do we possess the courage to respond to the truth of His "grasp"?

Please permit me to recount an example of this "grasp" from my personal experience. When the Archbishop of New Orleans ordained me as a Bishop, he did what Catholic Church ritual has done for centuries. Following that ancient rite of the laying on of hands found in the Sacred Scriptures, two deacons held an opened Book of the Gospels over my head. The Archbishop then prayed the Prayer of Ordination, after which he took the Book of the Gospels and handed it to me saying, "Receive the Gospel and preach the word of God with all patience and sound teaching." The Gospels were opened over my head and handed to me as a sign of the Word being given to me to be preached with "all patience and sound teaching." I accepted this weighty commission.

The articles of faith in the Creed come from God Himself through Jesus Christ and are passed on to you and to me by His Church. What we believe was presented to us at Baptism. We renewed that faith at Confirmation. Throughout our lives we renew that gift of faith at every Sunday Mass. As we read in the First Letter of St. Peter, "Since you have purified yourselves by obedience to the truth for sincere mutual love, love one another intensely from a [pure] heart" (1 Peter 1:22). Hopefully, with each obedient profession of faith, we grow in love for the God to whom we respond and for our fellow believers whom we serve.

Therefore, let us never be discouraged. We must be patient. So often parents lament that their children have fallen away from the Church and rejected the faith. They must not revisit the past and wonder what they could have done differently. They must live in the present and give good example to the fallen away. Show them how our profession of faith, our response to the "grasp" of God, can lead to true Christian joy. In this way we lead the wayward to Christ.

Yes, God exists. Faith in Him has consequences. It is so easy to say "no" to God. When we say "yes," however, we allow ourselves to be grasped by God. Ultimately the "grasp" and our response are mysteries. We do not have complete knowledge of how the rest of our lives will unfold, but we do have the promise of our Lord that it will be rewarding.

I will conclude with this reflection. Recall when our Lord met Nathanael in the Gospel of St. John. They had never met, yet our Lord said to him, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him" (John 1:47). Nathanael, puzzled, asked how our Lord knew him. "I saw you under the fig tree" (John 1:48), our Lord replied. Astounded at this recognition, Nathanael professed his faith saying, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49). Our Lord concluded the encounter by saying, "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this..." (John 1:50).

No one knows us better than God who created us. And when we profess our faith in Him, when we respond to His "grasp," then He reveals to us more of ourselves than we knew before and gives us hope in something even greater. He sees us under the fig tree, and we say "yes" to Him.

As we quicken our Advent pace, hastening to rejoice in the Incarnation at Christmas, may these coming months be for us a renewal of faith in the God who reaches out to grasp us. Extending my blessings to you and your loved ones, I remain

Devotedly yours in our Lord,

✠ Glen John Provost
Bishop of Lake Charles

Annual Tolton Gala honors several from Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Several clergy from the Diocese of Lake Charles were among those honored at the second annual Tolton Gala on Saturday, October 28, at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church. The special event was sponsored by the Tolton Ambassadors Louisiana and Tolton Associates.

The Most Reverend Joseph N. Perry, J.C.L., D.D., Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, was the guest speaker for gala, beginning with Mass.

The gala's purpose was to support the canonization of the Venerable Augustus Tolton (1854-1897), the first recognizably Roman Catholic priest of African descent in the United States. On

June 11, 2019, Pope Francis advanced Father Tolton to the title "Venerable" along the process for his canonization to sainthood.

Tolton persevered against all odds to become a priest, and his life of devotion and service to Catholics of all races during challenging times in America is exemplary. Bishop Perry is postulator of the priest's cause for sainthood.

"We want to keep the story alive, the memory of Venerable Tolton alive in hopes that people's financial support and his cause and to keep the prayer going that God will grant us this honor," Bishop Perry said.

Father Tolton was ordained in Rome in 1886. Formerly enslaved, he was the first African American priest to

address the subtle particulars of the 19th century racial prejudice found in society and the Church.

Awards at the gala were presented in five categories:

- Postulator's Award
- Father Peter McGirr Award
- Tolton Award
- Peter Paul and Martha Jane Award
- Anne Tolton Pettis Award

Deacon Fred Reed, who serves St. John Bosco Catholic Church in Westlake, was honored with the Postulator's Award for a life given to liturgical ministry as a servant leader.

The Father Peter McGirr Award was presented to **Rev. Ruben J. Buller**, Pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, and Vicar General for the Diocese of Lake Charles. The award honors a life example of pastoral care as a servant leader.

Rev. Timothy Goodly, Pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Sulphur, was honored with the Tolton Award for a life of priestly ministry as a servant leader.



Mr. and Mrs. Rapheal (Theresa) Lavergne, parishioners of Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Lake Charles, were recognized with the Peter Paul and Martha Jane Award, named for Father Tolton's parents, honoring the bond of marriage lived out as servant leaders.

The Anne Tolton Pettis Award was presented to **Stephanie Bernard**, Director of the Offices of Black Catholic Ministry and Justice and Peace in the Diocese of Lafayette. This honor recognizes a life devoted to

the Eucharist as a servant leader. The award is named after Father Augustus Tolton's sister, Anne, who was a dedicated supporter of her brother's priestly ministry.

Also presented at the gala was the inaugural Rev. Canon Gerard Jordan Scholarship in the amount of \$500 given to **Jorquetta Saner** of Evergreen Baptist Church. She attends the University of Houston-Clear Lake and is enrolled in an accelerated program for professional accounting.

Canon Jordan was an advocate for young mothers who sought to further their

education for a better life. He was educated by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament while attending Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School and graduated from St. Louis Catholic High School.

The gala and the Mass were a time of giving, instruction, and reflection to focus on the needs and common goals that serve the Church as well as the community at large. Chairperson for the Tolton Gala was **Altha M. Jordan Green**, and **Michelle Jackson** served as Co-Chair.

Office closures, publication dates

The offices of the Diocese of Lake Charles will close for the Christmas and New Year holidays at the end of business on Friday, December 22, and remain closed through Monday, January 1, 2024, reopening for regular business hours - 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 2. The next *Catholic Calendar* will be published on Friday, December 22.



Christmas Mass schedule for churches of the Diocese of Lake Charles

Bell City
St. John Vianney
(7120 Highway 14 E.)
11:30 p.m. (Eve); 8:30 a.m. (Day)

Big Lake
St. Mary of the Lake
(11054 Highway 384)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Carlyss
St. Theresa of the Child Jesus
(4822 Carlyss Drive)
4:00 p.m., 10:00 p.m. (Eve);
8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Creole
Sacred Heart of Jesus, East Cameron
(5250 West Creole Highway)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

DeQuincy
Our Lady of LaSalette
(203 S. Grand Avenue)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 10:30 a.m. (Day)

DeRidder
St. Joseph
(1125 Blankenship Drive)
4:00 p.m., 10:00 p.m. (Eve); 10:30 a.m. (Day)

Elizabeth
St. Frances of Rome Mission
(204 Poplar Street)
8:00 a.m. (Day)

Elton
St. Joseph
(209 Al Woods Street)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 8:30 a.m. (Day)

St. Paul
(1100 St. Mary Street)
6:00 p.m. (Eve); 7:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Fenton
St. Charles Borromeo
(804 Third Avenue)
6:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Hackberry
St. Peter the Apostle
(1210 Main Street)
5:00 p.m. (Eve); 8:00 a.m. (Day)

Iowa
St. Raphael
(211 S. Thomson Avenue)
4:00 p.m., (Eve); 9:30 a.m. (Day)

St. Peter Claver Mission
(503 Second Street)
8:00 a.m. (Day)

Jennings
Immaculate Conception
(705 S. Lake Arthur Avenue)
4:00 p.m., (Eve); 6:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady Help of Christians
(710 N. State Street)
4:00 p.m., 6:30 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady of Perpetual Help
(920 S. Broadway)
6:00 p.m. (Eve); 12:00 Midnight; 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Johnson Bayou
Our Lady of the Assumption Mission
(6470 Gulf Beach Highway)
11:00 a.m. (Day)

Kinder
St. Philip Neri
(607 Fourth Avenue)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Lacassine
St. John the Evangelist Mission
(306 Ann Street)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 7:00 a.m. (Day)

Lake Arthur
Our Lady of the Lake
(203 Commercial Avenue)
5:00 p.m. (Eve);
8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Lake Charles
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
(Corner of Kirby and Bilbo Streets)
4:00 p.m. (Eve);
12:00 Midnight, 7:30 a.m.,
9:30 a.m., 11:15 a.m. (Latin Mass) (Day)

Immaculate Heart of Mary
(2031 Opelousas Street)
4:00 p.m. (Eve);
12:00 Midnight, 9:30 a.m., (Day)

Our Lady of Good Counsel
(221 Aqua Drive)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady Queen of Heaven
(3939 Lake Street)
6:00 p.m. (Eve), Concert 11:15 p.m.;
12:00 Midnight, 7:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m.,
11:00 a.m., 5:30 p.m. (Day)

Sacred Heart of Jesus
(610 Louisiana Avenue)
4:30 p.m. (Eve); 8:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m. (Day)

St. Henry
(1021 Eighth Avenue)
5:00 p.m. (Eve); 12:00 Midnight (bilingual),
9:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. (Day)

St. Margaret of Scotland
(2500 Enterprise Blvd.)
(NW Corner of Enterprise Blvd. & 17th Street)
4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. (Eve);
7:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. (Day)

St. Martin de Porres
(5495 Elliott Road)
4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. (Eve); 8:00 a.m. (Day)

Christ the King
(7680 Gulf Highway)
4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. (Eve); 8:00 a.m. (Day)

CHRISTUS St. Patrick Chapel
(524 Dr. Michael DeBaKey Drive)
9:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady of Fatima Mission
(1700 Graham Street)
7:00 a.m. (Day)

LeBleu Settlement
(2110 Claude Hebert Road)
8:00 a.m. (Day)

Moss Bluff
St. Theodore
(785 Sam Houston Jones Parkway)
4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., 11:00 p.m. (Eve);
8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. (Day)

Oakdale
Sacred Heart of Jesus
(1208 E. 7th Avenue)
7:00 p.m. (Eve); 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Oberlin
St. Joan of Arc
(110 W. Fifth Avenue)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 7:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Ragley
St. Pius X
(16816 Highway 171)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. (Day)

Raymond
St. Lawrence
(5505 Pine Island Highway)
5:00 p.m. (Eve); 7:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m. (Day)

Sulphur
Immaculate Conception
(2700 Maplewood Drive)
4:00 p.m., 6:30 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady of LaSalette
(602 N. Claiborne Street)
4:00 p.m. (Eve); 12:00 Midnight 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Our Lady of Prompt Succor
(1109 Cypress Street)
5:00 p.m. (Eve);
12:00 Midnight, 8:00 a.m. (Latin),
10:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. (Day)

St. Francis de Sales Oratory
(802 South Huntington Street)
12:00 Midnight; 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. (Day)

Vinton
St. Joseph
(1502 Industrial Street)
4:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. (Eve); 9:00 a.m. (Day)

Welsh
Our Lady of Seven Dolors
(209 N. Adams Street)
4:00 p.m., 6:30 p.m. (Eve); 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m. (Day)

St. Joseph
(310 N. Sarah Street)
5:00 p.m. (Eve); 10:00 a.m. (Day)

Westlake
St. John Bosco
(1301 Sampson Street)
5:00 p.m. (Eve);
7:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m. (Day)

All Souls Day Mass celebrated at Consolata Cemetery

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Several hundred people gathered on a chilly night for the All Souls Day Mass of Remembrance at Consolata Cemetery on Thursday, November 2. Bishop Glen John Provost was the celebrant for the 6:00 p.m. liturgy as the sun was setting around the main mausoleum. The Mass is hosted annually by the Diocese of Lake Charles and Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church dedicates the entire month of November to praying in a special way for Holy Souls (also called the Faithful Departed) in Purgatory. The Holy Souls are referred to as the Church Suffering, while the Saints in Heaven are the Church Triumphant. The faithful on earth are the Church Militant.

Purgatory and prayers for the dead are an important part of the Month of Holy Souls. Since the Holy Souls in Purgatory cannot pray for themselves, they rely entirely on living souls to pray and make sacrifices on their behalf while awaiting purification of their souls.

In reference to the Gospel of John 15:3, "You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you," Bishop Provost

said in his homily that the word that prunes is the word that cuts, and what is left bears more fruit.

"Poor humans, we have difficulty letting go, but letting go we must," the bishop said. "To us all death comes. And when it does, it finds us either waiting, a healthy branch, united to the vine, or separated from it, thrown into the kiln."

"This belief should not depress us," he continued, "but rather prompt us to pray for ourselves and for them who have gone before us."

Bishop Provost told those in attendance that their visit to the cemetery is a reassurance, a reminder that God exists, and their departed loved ones live.

"God wishes us to be united with Him forever. May it be so for our faithful departed," said the bishop.

He went on to say, "May those who rest here come to the judgment united to the Lord as a living branch, pruned and strengthened, to enjoy the Beatific Vision."

Priests concelebrating the Mass with Bishop Provost were Rev. Monsignor Daniel A. Torres, Vicar General and Pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church; Very Rev. Rojo Koonathan, V.F., Pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church; Very Rev.



Bishop Glen John Provost is joined by several priests as he celebrates the Liturgy of the Eucharist during the All Souls Day Mass at Consolata Cemetery on November 2. The Mass is hosted annually by the Diocese of Lake Charles and Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church.

Aubrey Guilbeau, Pastor of St. Theodore Catholic Church; Rev. Josh Page, Parochial Vicar of Our Lady Queen of Heaven; Very Rev. Ruben Villarreal, Judicial Vicar; Rev. Nathan Long, Pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church and; Rev. Charles Okorougo. Also assisting were Deacon Harold Nixon of Our Lady Queen of Heaven and Deacon Brian Soileau, Director of Saint Charles Center and Camp Karol. Rev. Samuel Bond served as Master of Ceremonies.

Serving as Honor Guard for the Mass was Monsignor Hubert Cramers Assembly 320 Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus. Members of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, OLQH Court 1785 were also in attendance.

Following the Mass, the priests walked around blessing graves for family and friends.

Eternal Life grant unto them, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon them. May they Rest In Peace. Amen.