



Walk New Paths As Pilgrims of Hope

Our Lenten Journey: Walk New Paths

Jubilee Year 2025 encouraged us to find new paths in our ever-changing world. Paths that would lead us to right relationships and the courage to face the political and social dilemmas in which we find ourselves. As Pope Leo has told us:

...Although the context in which we live today is different from that of the fifth century, some similarities remain highly relevant. We are now, as then, in an era of widespread migratory movements; as then, we are living at a time of a profound readjustment of geopolitical balances and cultural paradigms; as then, we are, in Pope Francis's well-known expression, not in an era of change **but** in a change of era. [3] ...

Today, the meaning of words is ever more fluid, and the concepts they represent are increasingly ambiguous. Language is no longer the preferred means by which human beings come to know and encounter one another. Moreover, in the contortions **of** semantic ambiguity, language is becoming more and more a weapon with which to **deceive, or** to strike and offend opponents. We need words once again to express distinct and clear realities unequivocally. Only in this way can authentic dialogue resume without misunderstandings. This should happen in our homes and public spaces, in politics, in the media and on social media. It should likewise occur in the context of international relations and multilateralism, so that the latter can regain the strength needed for undertaking its role of encounter and mediation. This is indeed necessary for preventing conflicts, and for ensuring that no one is tempted to prevail over others with the mindset of force, whether verbal, physical **or** military. ...

*From Pope Leo's address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See
(9 January 2026)*

Recently, speaking on the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-16), Madonna Kuciejczyk-Kernan reminded us that as parishioners at St. Cronan Church, we have a charism to embody the social justice Gospel. We long for justice. Fr. Richard Rohr points out that “to live a just life in this world is to have identified with the longings and hungers of the poor, the meek, and those who weep.”

Perhaps longing for justice is not enough. We can avoid complicity in injustice by actively practicing faith-based justice: living the virtues, serving the marginalized, speaking truth, discernment, and aligning daily choices with Church teaching on human dignity and common good, rejecting neutrality, and transforming personal heart and societal systems through prayer and action.

Those who walked the paths before us

This Lenten Season, you are invited to meditate on six Holy People who have forged the paths before us and are true examples of Pilgrims of Hope.

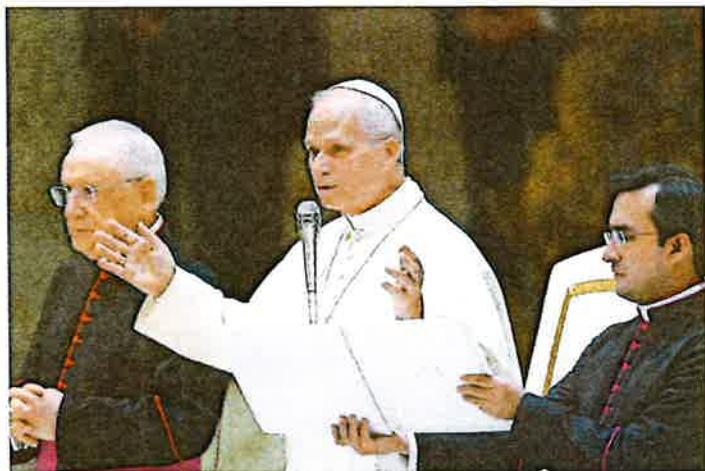
- Our Universal examples are the three Patron Saints of our own Archdiocese: St. Philippine Duchesne, St. Louis, and St. Vincent DePaul.
- Our Local examples are three Monsignors from St. Louis who “engaged mightily in the social ministry of the Church.” (Msgr. Nicholas Schneider, Forward, “Three Wise Men,” by Gerald J. Kleba): Msgr. John Shocklee, Msgr. Elmer Behrmann, and Msgr. David Ratermann.)

Through the courage and commitment shared in these stories, let us examine our own need to become pilgrims of hope in our wrecked society. Let us find our paths to engage in actions that will change our communities, states, and country to carry out the Church’s social teachings. Together let us come through this Lent as speakers of truth, standing up for those attacked in our midst and professing a preferential option for the poor.

Pope Leo XIV said: *“Peace is first and foremost a gift. It is the first gift of Christ: ‘My peace I give to you’ (Jn 14:27). Yet it is an active and demanding gift. It engages and challenges each of us, regardless of our cultural background or religious affiliation, demanding first of all that we work on ourselves*¹.

Lent begins two days after the World Day of Social Justice (February 20).

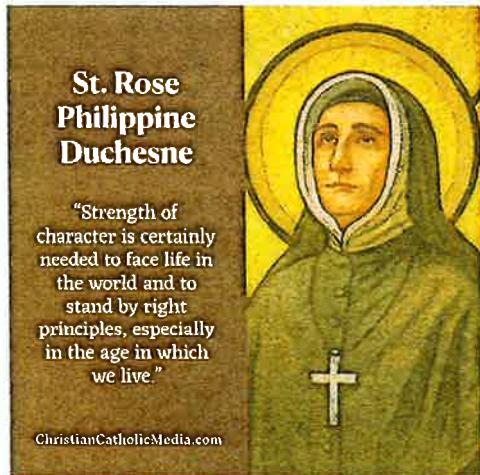
What will you do?



¹ Audience to members of the Vatican diplomatic corps, May 16, 2025

First Sunday of Lent: Temptation

St. Philippine Duchesne



St. Rose
Philippine
Duchesne

"Strength of character is certainly needed to face life in the world and to stand by right principles, especially in the age in which we live."

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St. Philippine Duchesne is the perfect example of perseverance amid diversity. Her life's dream was to teach Native Americans in the New World. When Bishop DuBourg came to her convent in search of Missionaries, she readily volunteered on the promise that she would live and teach among the Indians. Unfortunately, after a long and treacherous journey, she was ordered to open a school for white rich girls first in St. Charles, Missouri, and later in Florissant. She did her best in difficult circumstances. She founded the first house of the Society outside France. It was in a log cabin - and with it came all the austerities of frontier life: extreme cold, hard work, lack of funds. She also had difficulty learning English.

Philippine and four other Religious of the Sacred Heart forged ahead. In 1818 she opened the first free school west of the Mississippi. These schools were for the young women of Missouri and Louisiana. She loved and served them well, but always in her heart she yearned to serve the American Indians. When she was 72 and no longer superior, a school for the Potawatomi was opened at Sugar Creek, Kansas. Though many thought Philippine was too sick to go, the Jesuit head of the mission insisted: "She must come; she may not be able to do much work, but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us. Her very presence will draw down all manner of heavenly favors on the work."

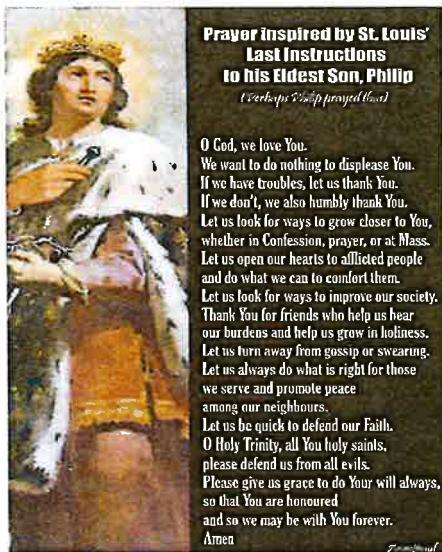
She was with the Potawatomi only for a year; however, her pioneer courage did not weaken, and her long hours of contemplation impelled the Indians to name her, Quah-kah-ka-num-ad, "Woman-Who-Prays-Always".

St. Philippine was sorely tempted to quit in the face of hardship. She had every right to show righteous indignation to Bishop DuBourg's "bait and switch" tactics, but she continued to obey and serve her people.

What path does St. Philippine follow? What is she telling you as you witness injustice and violence?

Second Sunday of Lent: Transfiguration

St. Louis IX



At his coronation as king of France, Louis IX bound himself by oath to behave as God's anointed, as the father of his people and feudal lord of the King of Peace. Other kings had done the same, of course. Louis was different in that he actually interpreted his kingly duties in the light of faith. After the violence of two previous reigns, he brought peace and justice.

Louis deserves credit for extending justice in civil administration. His regulations for royal officials became the first of a series of reform laws. He replaced trial by battle with a form of examination of witnesses and encouraged the use of written records in court.

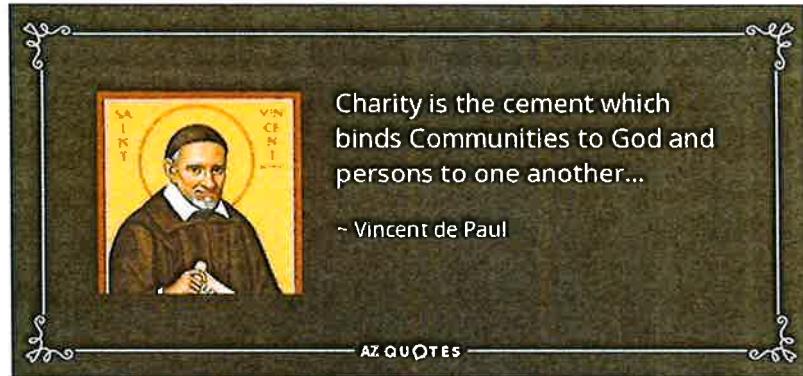
Saint Louis of France was devoted to his people, founding hospitals, visiting the sick, and like his patron Saint Francis, caring even for people with leprosy. He is one of the patrons of the Secular Franciscan Order. Louis united France—lords and townsfolk, peasants and priests and knights—by the force of his personality and holiness. For many years the nation was at peace.

Every day, Louis had 13 special guests from among the poor to eat with him, and a large number of poor were served meals near his palace. During Advent and Lent, all who presented themselves were given a meal, and Louis often served them in person. He kept lists of needy people, whom he regularly relieved, in every province of his dominion.

St. Louis transfigured his government to serve the common good, with a preferential option for the poor. What will it take to transform our present governments?

Third Sunday of Lent: Living Water (Samaritan Woman)

St. Vincent de Paul



St. Vincent de Paul was born to a poor peasant family in the French village of Pouy on April 24, 1581. His first formal education was provided by the Franciscans.

St. Vincent went to Avignon and later to Rome to continue his studies. While there he became a chaplain to the Count of Goigny and was placed in charge of distributing money to the deserving poor

From that point forward he spent his life preaching missions to and providing relief to the poor. He even established hospitals for them. This work became his passion. He later extended his concern and ministry to convicts. The need to evangelize and assist these souls was so great and the demands beyond his own ability to meet that he founded the Ladies of Charity, a lay institute of women, to help, as well as a religious institute of priests – the Congregation of Priests of the Mission, commonly referred to now as the Vincentians.

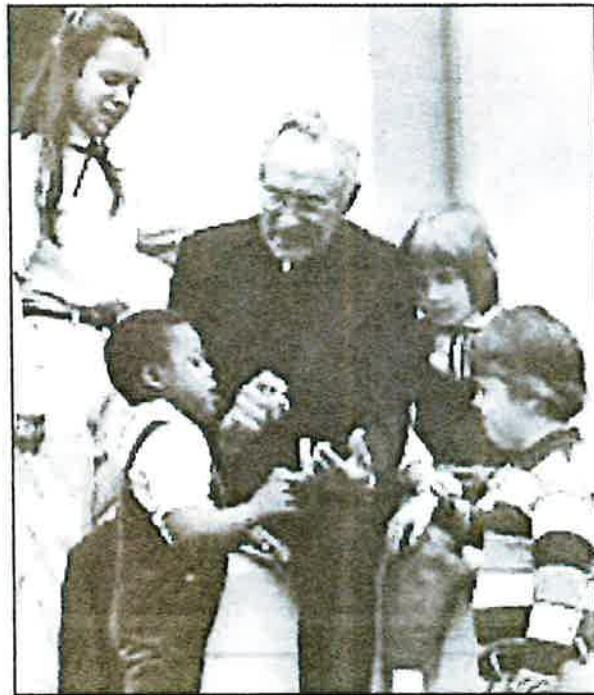
This was at a time when there were few priests in France and what priests there were, were neither well-formed nor faithful to their way of life. Vincent helped reform the clergy and the way they were prepared for the priesthood. He did this first through the presentation of retreats and later by helping develop a precursor to our modern-day seminaries. At one point his community was directing 53 upper-level seminaries. His retreats, open to priests and laymen, were so well attended that it is said he infused a “Christian spirit among more than 20,000 persons in his last 23 years.”

The Vincentians remain with us today with nearly 4,000 members in 86 countries. In addition to his order of Vincentian priests, St. Vincent cofounded the Daughters of Charity along with St. Louise de Marillac. There are more than 18,000 Daughters today serving the needs of the poor in 94 countries. He was eighty years old when he died in Paris on September 27, 1660. He had “become the symbol of the successful reform of the French Church.” St. Vincent is sometimes referred to as “The Apostle of Charity” and “The Father of the Poor”.

St. Vincent de Paul provided “living water” to the poor and educated priests and sisters to continue his work. How can we share Christ’s Living Water?

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Healing the Blind Man

Msgr. Elmer Behrmann



Before 1950, Catholic education was blind to instruction for children with developmental disabilities. Inspired by an encounter with a mother who chastised him for a church that failed to educate her special needs child, Fr. Behrmann, a young priest in St. Louis, went to see Archbishop Ritter to propose that these children be educated in archdiocesan facilities “on the basis of social justice”. After a night of wrestling with his conscience, Archbishop Ritter agreed and appointed a shocked Elmer Behrmann as Assistant Superintendent of Schools and Director of the Special Education Department. A special education department did not exist in any catholic education system in the nation.

Given a small office and no budget, Fr. Behrmann called on God’s providence to provide the money he would need. Through a series of “coincidental encounters”, he was able to find the funds he needed to start St. Mary’s School and later St. Joseph’s Vocational Center, to provide not only education, but training for these children to be able to have jobs and bring home a paycheck when they finished their education.

Msgr. Behrmann gained national recognition for his beloved special education program. He advised the President of the United States, and garnered the attention of the Rose Kennedy Foundation, among other philanthropies. His beloved program was used by Catholic Education programs across the nation.

The Catholic education system was blind to the needs of developmentally disabled children, who were kept locked away in their homes, under the care of their parents. Msgr. Behrmann, through his knowledge of education, love for these children, and courage, was able to open the eyes of authority to make Special Education a reality in St. Louis and the nation.

Where do we need to open the eyes of authority to make lives better?

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Raising of Lazarus

Msgr. John Shocklee

Fr. John Shocklee was the pastor at St. Bridget of Erin Catholic Church, next to the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex near Jefferson and Carr Street. Being so close to the complex, Fr. Shocklee soon developed programs for his neighbors, including the "Volunteer Improvement Program", which he ran every Saturday and became the forerunner of St. Louis School District GED. This program changed the lives of many residents of Pruitt-Igoe. As he got to know his neighbors, Msgr. Shocklee became the voice for racial justice and educational opportunities. He answered the call to march across the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, organizing a donated plane to take people from St. Louis.



Upon the death of Martin Luther King, many of the people in the complex and across St. Louis raised up in righteous anger. As they left Pruitt-Igoe, they were shouting, "Kill the Whitey!" Fr. Shocklee stood alone in the street, facing the angry mob. As they approached and saw their beloved priest, some in crowd continued their slogan "Kill Whitey!" Fr. Shocklee looked at them and said, "I'm Whitey. Kill me!" The crowd hesitated and finally dispersed. Through that act of bravery, he was able to become a "voice for dialogue that accounted for St. Louis avoiding the riots, fires and killings so common from Baltimore to Los Angeles." (Fr. Gerry Kleba);

Later in his priesthood, Msgr. Shocklee was assigned to pastor a rich, suburban parish in St. Louis. When he disagreed, Archbishop May told him, "I want you to go there because you will be good for those people and they need you. You will be able to connect the city and county, black and white, and rich and poor." Initially, Msgr. Shocklee faced a hostile, conservative congregation who disapproved of his liberal leanings. However, when he talked about the social teachings of the church and related to everyone in his warm manner, he soon had many followers. One man organized people to purchase turkeys to include in Christmas baskets for the inner city. When Shocklee went back to his beloved inner city, parishioners from St. Genevieve du Bois followed him to start and staff a food pantry at St. Liborius parish, adjacent to St. Bridget's.

Msgr. Shocklee's 50th Anniversary Celebration benefitted Cardinal Ritte College Prep High School, serving many African American students. Fr. Shocklee was instrumental in its founding and was delighted that his celebration could benefit scholarships for these students. The celebration almost didn't happen, because John was so humble, he thought no one would come and didn't want to embarrass the planning committee, but as he looked out at the vast crowd who did attend, he said, "I see black people and white people. I see poor people and rich people. I see young people, oh, there's a four-year old...with a ninety-four year old. I see over-educated people. ... I see lots of brother priests, a rabbi, several protestant ministers, too; I sure hope there are a few atheists in the crowd. When I die, I hope my tombstone will read, 'He brought us all together.'"

Like the raising of Lazarus, Msgr. Shocklee raised awareness for the African Americans of the inner city, tirelessly working on their behalf. What can we do to stand with all those who are affected by racism?

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Msgr. David Ratermann

In 1956, Fr. Ratermann, with brother priests Andrew Schierhoff and Andrew Kennedy, left for Bolivia to found a mission in La Paz, Bolivia. They established the parish of Christo Rey (Christ the King), serving the indigenous catechists in the villages they attended that were part of the Viacha parish. The priests would search for a villager who would be a good candidate for parish leader. They trained married men in several villages. The catechists worshipped around the altar with simplicity and reverence. With the other priests, Fr. Ratermann worked tirelessly to bring their catechist approach throughout the North Zone area of Altiplano.



After 20 years of parish work, Fr. Ratermann joined two other priests to live completely with natives to experience their extreme poverty and isolation. They wanted to identify with the marginalized and isolated Bolivian peasants. They lived with these conditions for two years and then returned to their priestly duties.

Fr. Ratermann has (had?) remarkable language skills. He mastered Spanish and then found he was also adept at Aymara and Quechua Indian languages. These are not written languages, but he became the first person to translate the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes into the languages of these indigenous peoples.

Archbishop May called him back to St. Louis to oversee the Mission Office, but he soon returned to Altiplano to live the simple lifestyle in one of the most remote and poorest countries in South America. He challenged the unjust systems that kept the Indian tin miners enslaved and impoverished and was imprisoned with them when he joined their strike. Although he did not suffer torture himself, he was deeply scarred listening to the torture of the indigenous people around him.

Fr. Ratermann had a deep love for the Beatitudes. He was able to relate each beatitude to his own life, often sharing the ways in which he had failed to live those qualities. In Bolivia, his pastoral line was to encourage the Indians to assume roles of active leadership, which, after much pain, imprisonment and suffering in which he shared, eventually led to the election of a president who was a full-blooded Indian.

In the words of Msgr. Ratermann, "It was Jesus' very fidelity [to the Beatitudes] that certainly led him to the cross and death. It was that same fidelity that led to the Resurrection. It is Jesus himself who lives the beatitudes to the nth degree and so shows us the way. And if we are privileged to live them even only partially, blessed are we indeed.

Msgr. Ratermann's life emulated Jesus' Passion, Death, and Resurrection. His emersion into lives of the marginalized and isolated Bolivian peasants was the epitome of a preferential option for the poor. What can we do to follow his example in our own lives?

Our Lenten Journey

Pilgrims of Hope

We have examined the lives and actions of six holy people who forged new paths as pilgrims of hope. Through the courage and commitment shared in these stories, let us examine our own need to forge even newer paths as pilgrims of hope in our wrecked society. Let us find our paths to engage in actions that will change our communities, states, and country to carry out the Church's social teachings, to emulate the Beatitudes, and to fight against the oppressive systems forged by our government and those tyrannies throughout the world.

We Walk Together As Pilgrims of Hope



In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken

- Pope Francis

St. Cronan Church

Lent, 2026

