On Christmas Eve 1993, in the remote Atlas Mountains of Algeria, several men carrying machine guns appeared in the courtyard of the Trappist monastery at Tibhirine. Recent events made their appearance ominous. On December 1 of the same year, a one-month grace period had expired in which the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), rebels fighting the government, had warned all foreigners to leave the country. The gunmen demanded to see the Trappist father superior. Father Christian de Chergé, a Frenchmen like all the other monks, appeared, but was not intimidated: “This is a house of peace. No one has ever come in here carrying weapons. If you want to talk with us, come in, but leave your arms outside. If you cannot do that, we will talk outside.” It was a bold gesture, but Dom Christian had learned something living among the Algerian Muslims for almost twenty-five years; in their own way, even the armed bands respected religious commitment to peace.

The intruders made three demands. First, the monastery had to support the rebels; second, the Trappists had to send their doctor to take care of the GIA wounded; finally, the monks should donate medicine to the revolutionary cause.

Dom Christian deftly parried each of these requests. The community might seem rich, but was in fact poor, earning its own daily bread by working. The doctor was too old to travel into the mountains. But as religious, the monks would care for whoever appeared in need before them, without taking sides in political or military conflicts. Besides, it was Christmas Eve and they were at the moment preparing to celebrate the feast commemorating Christ’s birth; it was outrageous for soldiers to interrupt them in their sacred duties. With an odd mixture of chivalry and brutality, the gunmen apologized: “In that case, please excuse us. We did not know.” but promised to return. Dom Christian had turned aside the threat—for the moment.

A little over two-and-a-half years later, Dom Christian and six of his companions would have their throats cut in cold blood. The extensive documentation that exists about it has made it easy, unlike the cases of thousands of native black African martyrs, to reconstruct how one group of Christians was willing to expose itself to danger as a religious witness, knowing in advance that the gesture would probably bear little immediate fruit.

Algeria, as a French colony, presented many difficulties to missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the century’s end, the difficulties were even worse. In the 1980s and 1990s, Algeria began to feel the pressure of fundamentalist Islamic groups that were springing up around the world. A new
Martyrs of Algeria
Continued from page 1

Type of intolerance arrived. Many devout Muslims around the world had denounced the terrorism as not in harmony with the principles of Islam, which proclaims that Allah is the “All-Merciful.” But for extremists, fundamentalist Islam presented a potent combination of political power and religious enthusiasm that could be used to assert national identity in the world over against the influential, wealthy nations.

Like all the monks and nuns in the Benedictine/Cistercian tradition, they took a vow of “stability,” which is meant to link them to the community in which they live until death. The monastery at Tibhirine, Our Lady of Atlas, had committed itself to a continuous witness among the people of Atlas for over half a century of Algerian history, including the most troubled periods. So they remained in the monastery with basically no change in their way of life.

The only modifications in policy that they voted for were to offer medical aid to all comers at the monastery itself, to reduce the number of monks and new novices for the time being. They voted to confirm their commitment to be living witnesses of God’s love in Algeria — through prayer, a simple life, manual labor, and openness and sharing with everyone, especially the poorest. The calmness and lucidity of these decisions were a marked contrast to the fact that armed conflict was increasing all around the Trappists. The violence struck at the monastery there.

When some sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles also fell to armed bands, a visiting papal delegate told the Trappists at the funeral that he admired and agreed with their decision, but encouraged them not to ignore basic prudence and discretion despite their commitments. The monks had long ago made up their minds to give a certain kind of witness: “We see that we are at a juncture between two groups [i.e., government and Fundamentalist rebels] who are in conflict here and, to some extent, everywhere in the West and the Near East.”

Father Christopher Lebreton, one of the Trappists wrote, ‘There is something unique in our way of being Church: how we react to events, how we wait for them and live them out in practice. It has to do with an awareness that we are responsible not for doing something, but for being something here, in response to Truth and to Love. Are we facing eternity?’ And he observes: “The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom. In all of this, it is difficult not to feel that we have a window into something of the same spirit with which Christ himself remained firm in his decision to go up to Jerusalem near his end, even though he knew what the result would be.”

The Trappists, of course, had Christ’s example constantly in mind. But they were also mindful that to claim for themselves some kind of special virtue in the circumstances would be to betray the humble love that they felt for the Algerians. For one thing, they feared that the outside world, knowing little of the good Muslim people (who later condemned the killing of the monks), might take their death as a triumphantistic mark of Christian superiority. With this in mind, Dom Christian reflects in a letter that has become known as his “Testament:”

“I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil which seems, alas, to prevail in the world, even in the evil which might blindly strike me down. I would like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who will strike me down. I could not desire such a death. It seems to me important to state this. I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice if the people I love were indiscriminately accused of my murder: It would be too high a price to pay for what will perhaps be called the “grace of martyrdom.”

Dom Christian had long been one of the guiding spirits of the Ribat es Salam (“Bond of Peace”), a group engaged in Islamic-Christian dialogue. If anything were likely to overcome centuries of conflict and mistrust between Muslims and Christians, it would have to be the kind of initiative, backed up by willingness to give everything, that he and his brothers engaged in. His final words in the Testament are addressed to the person who may, someday, cause his death: “In God’s face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both. Amen! In H’Allah!”

That heartfelt prayer was soon tested. As is often the case with martyrdom, the finale was mixed up with politics and human passions in a way that, for some observers, might obscure the offering of self that was present among the monks for years before the end. During the night of March 27, 1996, seven of the monks were abducted in a two month ordeal that would stretch out almost until Pentecost. Gone was the mutual religious respect manifested by the dark visitors on Christmas Eve two years earlier.

Citing selectively from Muslim law, the GIA stated: “It is licit to apply to these monks what applies to unbelievers who are prisoners of war, namely: death, slavery or exchange for Muslim prisoners.” Governments who are given ultimatums by terrorists cannot give in without inviting more terrorism. That reasoning guided the French and Algerian authorities, though they sought ways to negotiate a solution. But all outside pleas were to no avail.

On May 23, 1996, the GIA announced that they had cut the throats of all seven monks — Dom Christian de Chergè, Brother Luke Dochier, Father Christopher Lebreton, Brother Michael Fleury, Father Bruno Lemarchand, Father Celestine Ringard, and Brother Paul Favre Miville — two days before.

Their heads were eventually found, but not their bodies. The funeral Mass took place in the Algiers Basilica of Our Lady of Africa. The remains were then quietly taken, with military security, back to the monastery for burial together in the cemetery there.
**All Things Considered**

By now you know the drill. If you are coming to the Christmas Eve liturgy, you need to bring three things with you.

1. **Bring a child.** Size smallish. Patterns of worship are shifting more to Christmas Eve rather than Christmas Day, so that makes it prime time for a lot of people. But our vigil mass is designed with kids in mind. Make space for a family with children by electing to worship at one of the other three marvelous Christmas masses.

2. **Bring a bell.** At the singing of the “Gloria of the Bells” we ring in the Christmas season accompanied by a whole panoply of bells that the congregation brings from home. It’s crazy and wonderful at the same time.

3. **Bring a gift for Pregnancy Aid.** Every child is a son or daughter of God. The infant Jesus born in Bethlehem was born into abject poverty. A few kind strangers helped Mary and Joseph in their time of need. It’s our turn now to help a newborn in need. Bring a gift for a baby or a new mother.

   This year, I am amending the list to include a fourth “need to bring.” As a matter of fact, it’s something that you need to bring no matter what mass you may be attending.

4. **You need to bring someone with you who ordinarily would not come.** Jesuit Jack Bentz writing in the December 3rd issue of America Magazine points out: “Our experience of Christmas Mass is going to be different depending on our place in the mix. For the regular Mass-goers, it will seem homey and routine, and a nod of recognition is going to be enough.

   But the Catholics who go to church only on Christmas and Easter will carry with them the reasons they usually do not make it to Mass. So they are going to need more than a nod. Their experience will hinge on feeling welcomed or not. Studies bear this out. People return to churches because they are welcomed, not because the church got everything else right. Both regular Mass-goers and Christmas Catholics can make this work better.

   And for those who call this particular parish home, Christmas is the chance to welcome the stranger, to be the good innkeeper in the Nativity story and not the bad one. And who knows, the welcome you extend to the infrequent Mass-goer might be what brings that person into community. And next year you both will be welcoming a new stranger together.

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**Pregnancy Aid Giving Tree**

For 24 Advent seasons now, we have erected a Pregnancy Aid Giving Tree in our church building as a demonstrative way of supporting our pro-life convictions. This Giving Tree outreach program benefits the local Pregnancy Aid Society at 17325 Mack, where women with unplanned pregnancies can find positive alternatives to abortion. Take a “snowflake” from the tree as a pledge – a reminder – and a gift tag – to bring back attached to a present for a newborn at one of our Christmas masses.

The Pregnancy Aid Society has a wish list which includes: baby clothing (0-12 mos.), sleepers, blankets, bibs, undershirts (one-piece snap-style), bath accessories, baby toiletries, diapers (size 1 and 2), strollers, breast-feeding accessories and informative books like: “You and Your Baby” or support items such as “Baby Einstein” DVDs, books and toys. “Pack ’n Plays,” along with Pack ’n Play-sized crib sheets, are also welcomed, as are all gently used baby furniture and car carriers. In short – things that are practical, educational and essential.

The major assimilation of these items takes place at our Christmas Eve Children’s liturgy, but early gifts can be brought in on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22nd and 23rd, or to the other Christmas masses. Items brought in at Christmastime are part of an inventory from which Pregnancy Aid draws all year long. There are few better ways to give a birthday present today to Jesus than through this Pregnancy Aid project.

Our confessionals suffered water damage over the past few years. Now that we have finished tuck pointing on the Eastern facade of the building, we are now repairing the interiors of those spaces – including the fabled, “Clint Eastwood Room.” Both confessionalists should be ready for this week’s communal penance service.

There is something about the Christmas season that appeals to “our better angels” – to appropriate a phrase from Abe Lincoln. It’s a time to re-establish peace and equilibrium. What’s messing up your relationship with God, others, or your own self? Start working to get in better harmony before Christmas. When we fail to allow God to work in us for the good, we have a powerful tool in the Sacrament of Penance by which we are restored to grace and given a fresh start. There will be opportunities for private confession at this Saturday’s Communal Penance Service.

A great healing ministry is provided to our Archdiocese by the Capuchin Fathers. Confessions are heard Monday through Saturday on the hour from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 (with the exception of a break at 1:00 p.m.) at St. Bonaventure’s Monastery on Mt. Elliot. Visit and pray with Solanus Casey if you’re making the trip there.
Faith Formation Station

“May you have the gladness of Christmas which is hope; the spirit of Christmas which is peace; the heart of Christmas which is love.” – Ada V. Hendriks

As you prepare to celebrate Christmas with your family, I offer you a summary of an article I really enjoy and reread each year to remind me of how my family fits in the stable at Christmas: “Your Family May Be Holier than You Think!” by Lorene Hanley Duquin.

At Christmastime we see images of the Holy Family on lawns, on greeting cards, and in our homes. Our kids reenact the story of the Holy Family in pageants. We sing Christmas carols that tell of the story of the angels, shepherds, a manger, and a star. We may even hear in homilies how we are called to imitate the Holy Family. If you’re thinking that your family could never compare with the holiness of the Holy Family, maybe it’s time to take a closer look at what holiness really means!

Start by putting yourself in Mary and Joseph’s situation. The manger scene may look peaceful and serene 2,000 years after the birth of Jesus. But think for a moment how difficult it must have been for Mary to give birth in an animal shelter. Think about how helpless Joseph must have felt. Did he remember how he almost divorced Mary? Was he worried about how he was going to take care of this child conceived by the Holy Spirit?

When we look beneath the serenity of the Nativity scene, we see tensions, discomfort, and fear. They are the same kind of struggles that modern-day families face. Spouses misunderstand one another. We have to face the uncertainty of the future. We have problems to overcome. We have decisions to make. We don’t always have the comforts we would like.

Holiness is not just about persevering through troubling times, however. We know our families are holy when we recognize the same compassion, commitment, courage, sacrifice, and joy that Mary and Joseph experienced. We find holiness in the ordinary experiences of our lives. When we teach a child a new skill, when we discipline a child with love, when we keep our children safe and healthy, we are living our lives in the same way that the Holy Family lived.

The essence of what we see in the lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is a relationship of love — loving God and loving each other. When we pray together as a family, when we forgive or seek forgiveness, when we treat others with compassion, when we help people in need, we are holy because we are living our lives with love.

REMINDER:

It is a cherished custom at St. Ambrose Church to re-enact the Christmas Gospel story at the 4:00 p.m. Children’s Christmas Eve Liturgy. Children (four years old and above) and teens are invited to participate — no experience necessary and costumes are provided. The one and only rehearsal is next Sunday, December 23rd, after the 11:15 mass. Sign-up sheets are available at Religious Education on Sunday; however, if your children are not in the program but are interested in participating, please call the parish office to sign up.

Kelly Woolums

Pray Every Day

Could you be searching for a fresh new way to pray every day of the year? Daily Prayer 2019 is your guide to prayer that includes scripture, psalmody, a brief reflection, general intercessions, and a closing prayer. It is ideal for personal and family reflection upon the word of God. This also makes an excellent gift for seniors, newlyweds, or for a student away at college. These prayerbooks are now discounted to $8 each, which is a modest investment in someone’s spiritual formation. To pick up a copy of this year’s Daily Prayer 2019, stop in the back of church or call the rectory office at 822-2814.
Journey of Hope

As Catholics, like Mary we could metaphorically give birth to Christ by sharing his love through the mysteries of the rosary. In fact, we could birth Christ through personal encounters, as well as in interfaith and ecumenical gatherings. Truthfully, in being alone with Mary, we zealously join Mary’s loving mission in her Son’s birth, death and resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was a meek and humble peasant girl from Nazareth, yet she was used beyond measure within the Gospel narratives. Her dutiful and humble receptivity toward God’s plan made her nothing less than “God-bearer” by giving birth to the salvific truth that is identified with Christ. Several theologians have acknowledged her as “the Ark of God,” the “Mother of God,” and the “Mother of the whole World.” When Mary was alone with the Spirit she discerned with the help of an angel that she was to be the Mother of God. Scripture points out that Mary indicated her availability with her simple and trusting “Yes” (“fiat”) (Lk 1). Mary listened to the Spirit and obeyed the Angel Gabriel. I believe each of us has a guiding Angel. However, do we become sensitive to the prompting and direction of our guardian Angels? Now, we could all learn from Mary’s unhesitating trust to say “yes” just as she did to Angel Gabriel. Mary’s ‘yes’ to the Angel enabled her to give birth to Jesus. We too could give birth to Christ by proclaiming Christ’s message to each other. The Word that became flesh by Mary’s accessibility is actually the core of our freedom, peace, unity and love of God to humanity.

The meaning of being alone with Mary is also reflected in the fourfold mysteries of the Rosary we often pray. These mysteries are joyful mysteries, sorrowful mysteries, illumination mysteries and the glorious mysteries. Each of these mysteries is a good starting point to have an encounter with Mary. One might begin with a theological reflection or a journal upon certain Marian scripture passages. Get this, Mary left everything behind to be with Elizabeth. One might wonder how often have we left behind our own struggles and considered those who are more in need than ourselves? For example, staying with long-term hospital patients or sheltering the poor and the marginalized? Mary dutifully saw Elizabeth’s situation as indispensable. Mary simply visited Elizabeth with a heartfelt welcoming tune. At that moment, the baby in her [Elizabeth’s] womb leapt for joy. And so, in being alone with Mary, may we stay connected to her as our model and imitate her because our Blessed Mother shares with us the anointing power of the Holy Spirit.

Dn. Anthony Kote-Witah, OFM Cap.

Vincentian Reflection

In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist says, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise…” Christmas is a time of love and gift giving…please share your abundance by giving a gift to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul so that those who do not have clothes and food can share in the blessings of Christmas.

To contact the St. Vincent de Paul Society to help or for help within our parish boundaries, please contact us at (313) 822-2814 or stambrose@comcast.net.

GIVE A CHEER!

Please join in the annual Tap Into Life Young Adult Christmas Mixer! There will be great food, games and tons of smiles and laughter! It will be held this Sunday December 16th, 6 p.m. at The Solanus Casey Center 1780 Mt. Elliott St. Detroit, MI. Spread the word and please bring a friend! RSVP by emailing TapIntoLife@thecapuchins.org

Like them on Facebook: facebook.com/TapIntoLifeYo. Listen to the podcast: Tap Into Life Podcast: media.zencast.fm/tap-into-life. Follow them on Instagram: TapIntoLife, or on Snapchat: TapIntoLifeYo.
Liturgical Schedule for the Coming Week

Monday, December 17
8:30 a.m. - Morning Prayer

Tuesday, December 18
8:30 a.m. - Mass - Paul Sulek, Harold Worrell, Richard Morton

Wednesday, December 19
8:30 a.m. - Morning Prayer

Thursday, December 20
8:30 a.m. - Mass - John & Barbara Hern

Friday, December 21
St. Peter Canisius, priest & doctor
8:30 a.m. - Anthony & Jeanne Maksym

Saturday, December 22
2:00 p.m. - Communal Penance
4:00 p.m. - Mass - For All People

Sunday, December 23
The Fourth Sunday in Advent
8:30 a.m. - For All People
11:15 a.m. - For All People

Your Envelope Speaks . . . the Inside Story

To operate, each week our parish requires a minimum of $10,100.00.

On Sunday, December 9, 2018
in envelopes we received $4,739.00
in the loose collection $926.00
in electronic donations $1,390.00
for a total of $7,055.00
UNDER budget for the week $3,045.00
Number of envelopes mailed 900
Number of envelopes used 135

“The Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 22nd and December 23rd

4:00 p.m. – Saturday – Celebrant: Fr. Pelc  Lector: Bern Degnan
Eucharistic Ministers: Karen McShane, Matthew Strong, Mary Urbanski
Altar Servers: Andrew & Joseph Strong

8:30 a.m. – Sunday – Celebrant: Fr. Bede  Lector: Norman Cure
Eucharistic Ministers: Colleen Drummond, Christopher Harrison, Bob Jogan,
Steve Linne, Joellyn Valgoi, Chris Walsh
Altar Servers: Nicholas, Margaret, & Meredith Kramer

11:15 a.m. - Celebrant: Bp. Gumbleton  Lector: Roger Playwin
Eucharistic Ministers: Thomas Bennert, Anne Billiu, Doris Fleming,
Joseph Hugh, Pat & Michael Moceri, Sue Playwin
Altar Servers: Ava Boley, Liam O’Byrne

Opłatek

Before sitting down to Christmas Eve dinner, many families with roots in Poland and other Eastern European countries will take part in the opłatek tradition. The sharing of this unleavened bread with another person is a time to tell each other, ‘I love you, I care about you.’ These wafers are sold through our parish, at our office or after mass in church. White wafers are for the human members of the family; pets get the tinted ones. If you cannot find Opłatek in stores, we have some here for you.
Shop St. Ambrose

Are you looking for a special gift for that hard-to-buy-for loved one? St. Ambrose offers some limited items for your Christmas giving. These are exclusive to our parish and some quantities are limited.

**Buy-A-Brick** – Memorialize a loved one, or “carve in stone” an event with a personalized brick paver that will be installed in our memorial walkway. Pavers run between $500 and $1,000 depending on size. Here’s a gift that becomes a tangible part of Ambrosian history, viewed by generations to come.

**Ghirelli Rosaries** – Six different custom-designed rosaries made by hand in Italy expressly for St. Ambrose Parish. The bead collection ranges from hard wood, bohemian glass and semi-precious stones. The crucifix is taken from the ARK Plaza sculpture. The center piece depicts the First and Second Coming of Christ from our sanctuary and the “pater” beads are taken from a detail in our stained glass windows. Not just a beautiful work of craftsmanship, but a useful aid in prayer – a real legacy piece! Prices run between $48 and $107 dollars. They come boxed and presented in a velvet gift bag.

**“Feeding the Multitude”** – a collection of more than 250 recipes provided by the cooks of St. Ambrose Parish. This spiral bound book contains a special section with meal prayers for the seasons of the Church year as well as for special family celebrations.

**Commemorative Bee Tile** – Designed and produced exclusively for St. Ambrose Parish by David Ellison, a Detroit-area tile maker who was instrumental in establishing the tile-making program at historic Pewabic Pottery. The size of the tile, unframed, is 6” x 6” and costs $85.00, gift-boxed.

**Christmas Cherub** – A reproduction of a DePrato Cherub that donned the St. Ambrose Creche over 75 years ago. Each Cherub is a hand-painted resin casting by Ellison Studios, numbered and signed. Every one is a unique work of art at $75 each. (Limited Supplies remaining)

**St. Ambrose Honey** – To protect the struggling hives, no honey will be harvested in 2018.

The Christmas Season at St. Ambrose

**COMMUNAL PENANCE SERVICE**
Saturday, December 22, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

**THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT**
Saturday, December 22, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.
**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2018 AT 8:30 A.M. AND 11:15 A.M.**

**VIGIL OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST**
Monday, December 24, 2018,
**CHILDREN’S LITURGY AT 4:00 P.M.**

**FEAST OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST**
Tuesday, December 25, 2018
**MIDNIGHT MASS AT 12:00 A.M.**
Preceded by a Concert at 11:30 p.m.
**M A S S O N C H R I S T M A S D A Y AT 8:30 A.M. AND AT 11:15 A.M.**

**FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY**
Saturday, December 29, 2018,
**M A S S AT 4:00 P.M.**
Sunday, December 30, 2018,
**M A S S AT 8:30 A.M. AND 11:15 A.M.**

**NEW YEAR’S EVE & DAY**
Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God
Monday, December 31, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.
**TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2019, MASS AT 10:00 A.M.**

**THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD**
Saturday, January 5, 2019,
**M A S S AT 4:00 P.M.**
Sunday, January 6, 2019,
**M A S S AT 8:30 A.M. AND 11:15 A.M.**

**THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**
Saturday, January 12, 2019,
**M A S S AT 4:00 P.M. - CONFIRMATIONS**
Sunday, January 13, 2019,
**M A S S AT 8:30 A.M. AND 11:15 A.M.**