

Gifts of Grace Ministry Newsletter

Fall Edition, 2016



Website: www.giftsofgraceministry.org

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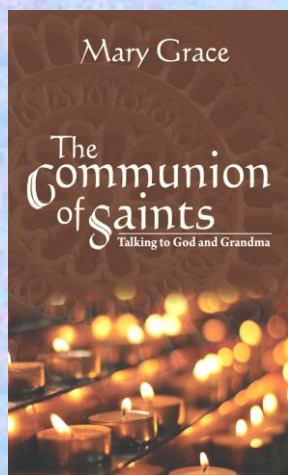
Fall is the time of year I look forward to. The pace of busy summertime activities slows down dramatically and it feels like a chance to catch my breath. At the same time, it's the season for harvesting garden delectables and preparing for the long winter ahead. For my family, it also means cutting, splitting and stacking lots of wood to heat our home. There is something comforting, however, in the routine and I'm especially counting my blessings this October in the wake of Hurricane Matthew.

For millions of people on the east coast and in the Caribbean, their lives are anything but routine. The hurricane struck with a vengeance and blew their way of living into another dimension. I, like many, watched the disaster unfold by gluing myself to CNN. It was a true-life reality show of the worst kind. I could only watch and pray for all those who were unable to escape, and for those who had to evacuate, not knowing if they would have a home to return to.

As the hurricane passed, thousands more were devastated by flooding as they watched their lives float away. In the aftermath, millions are left without homes, power, food, water or even a warm bed to sleep in. In Haiti, where there was little to begin with, hundreds have died and thousands are cut off from much needed aid and supplies. Many may ask, "Where is God in all of this?"

God is ever present in our midst in each one of His children. We all carry the Divine spark, which makes us holy; it also makes each of us a "saint." Most people think "saints" refer to only the dead canonized people who meet strict criteria set by the Catholic Church. However, the word "saint" stems from the Greek word "Hagios," which simply means "holy." Since all of God's children

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The Communion of Saints
Talking to God & Grandma
By: Mary Grace

are holy, we are all saints. St. Paul explained, “Neither Jew, nor Greek, nor slave or free, we are all one in Christ; we are all called to be saints (Galatians 3:28). No, God does not abandon us in our time of greatest need, He gave us each other; He gave us saints.

When disaster strikes, the saint in each of us rises to the surface; our divinity shines through in our humanity. For it’s in mutual pain and compassion that people come together, as simple children of God, to help each other through tragedy. Saints come in many forms, such as firemen, first responders and armed forces, as well as nurses and newscasters. They are the social workers, shelter aids, volunteers and veterinarians. Saints are doctors, dishwashers, truck drivers, teachers, ministers, and the media. The saints donate food, clothing, medical supplies, blankets and even blood. They share their homes, provide hugs, are good listeners, and give strength to their neighbors by helping to clean up, to cope, to comfort and to cry.

Although I watch many catastrophes from the security of my living room, I also see countless videos of people helping their brothers and sisters in Christ. “Whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers, that you do unto me” (Matthew 25:4). Whether it’s an earthquake, a forest fire, a Tsunami, or a hurricane, throughout the ravaged areas, saints have come together to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and to bring comfort to those who mourn. In times of disaster, people recognize that we are all one; we are all the light and love of God, and we are all members of the communion of saints.

During this fall season, when the leaves are changing color and many of us are getting back to our routines, let’s take a moment to pray for those throughout the world who are less fortunate. We can also take the time to donate supplies, time, or funds to a local charity.

One way of helping the victims of Hurricane Matthew is by giving to the Red Cross. You can go directly to their website by clicking on this link: <http://www.redcross.org/>
To donate to the people of Haiti, you can go to: <http://www.hopehaiti.org/>

For those who are struggling in the aftermath of the storm, know that you’re not alone and you are not forgotten. A multitude of saints are with you, and so is God.

With heartfelt prayers and love,

Mary Grace



Saints to the Rescue after Matthew

The Philadelphia Saints

There are millions of people affected by natural disasters each year. At the same time, there are countless more that struggle year-round in destitute conditions. These are the most impoverished neighborhoods found in nearly all major cities. One such region is called “Kensington,” which lies on the northeast side of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Hanna Volunteers at
St. Francis Inn

Living among the homeless and needy in Kensington, is a small band of saints who make up the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry (FVM). I was recently made aware of this sacred site when my niece, Hanna Briggs, decided to dedicate a year of her life to serving the poor. Over 400 people a day are provided with a meal at the safe haven; more importantly, they receive kindness and dignity from the caring workers. I urge you to watch this life-changing documentary about the ministry; simply click on this link:

<http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/54102496>

Hanna has been volunteering at the mission for only a few months, but she loves the work and the people. Philadelphia truly is the city of brotherly love! For more information go to: <http://www.franciscanvolunteerministry.org/>

Events with Mary Grace

Presentation & Workshop for Virginia Beach IANDS

(International Association of Near-Death Studies)

@ Association for Research & Enlightenment (A.R.E.)

Edgar Cayce Foundation

215 67th Street, Virginia Beach, VA

Saturday, October 29

Presentation: Life After Near-Death: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Workshop: Science, Religion & the Supernatural

Faith, Reason & the Paranormal

2:00pm - 4:00pm

Suggested donation: \$10.00 for NDE talk and \$15.00 for workshop.

For more information go to: <http://www.vbiands.com/> or

<https://www.facebook.com/VBIANDS>

Featured Saint: St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1286)

Feast Day, October 4

Patron Saint of Animals,
Merchants & Ecology



Francis Bernadone was born in Assisi, Italy in 1182 and grew up leading a privileged life as the son of a wealthy fabric merchant. His affluence allowed him to drink, party, travel and spend money freely. At the same time, Francis was said to be charming, charismatic and generous. His father wanted him to become a business man and taught him about the textile trade.

At the age of nineteen Francis went to battle in a war against the nearby town of Perugia. He was captured and held prisoner in a dungeon for a year before his father paid the ransom to set him free. However, the arduous conditions led to a serious illness, which brought visions from God. On one of these occasions he was directed to help the sick and poor; the mystical experiences forever changed him.

In a spiritual crisis, Francis reflected on his frivolous lifestyle and decided to devote his time to serving the needy and underprivileged, giving all his money to the church. His father became furious and went so far as to disinherit him. Francis left home and took a vow of poverty.

One day, while praying in the church of San Damiano near Assisi, Francis heard God tell him, "Rebuild my church." He misunderstood the directive, and with toolkit in hand, he set out to do the much needed maintenance on the structure. He eventually realized that it was the *body* of the church that needed repair, not the *buildings* themselves.

As Francis lived in poverty and preached about the life of Christ, many began to follow him. This group of supporters became known as Franciscan friars. He had one basic rule, which was "To follow the teachings of Jesus and to walk in his footsteps." His philosophy of Christ-like poverty was a radical notion at the time. The Christian church and its leaders were extremely wealthy and lived lavishly, which was disconcerting for Francis and many others. Therefore, the monk set out on a mission to restore the values of Jesus.

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With his incredible charisma, Francis drew thousands of followers to him. He was soon preaching in up to five villages per day, teaching a new kind of emotional and personal Christian religion that everyday people could understand. They listened to his compelling sermons and joined in his way of life. This eventually led to the establishment of the Franciscans Order, now known as the Order of Friars Minor (OFM).

Francis was known for his love of nature and even preached to the animals. There are many stories about his ability to communicate with wildlife. On one occasion he was talking to a flock of birds when they began to sing and flew into the sky forming the sign of a cross. Another story tells of a vicious wolf in the town Gubbio that was killing people and sheep. The monk went to the village to confront the wolf. He made the sign of the cross and told the canine not to hurt anyone else. From then on the wolf became tame and the town was safe.

One of Francis's most famous followers was St. Clair of Assisi, who became his friend and confidant. When she wanted to take the Franciscan vows, Francis helped her start a similar ministry for woman. The Order of Saint Clair was established, which became known as "The Poor Clares."

In 1224, Francis began a forty-day fast to honor the feast of St. Michael the arch angel. During this time, while praying on Mt. La Verna (Alverna), he received a vision of an angel with six bright wings descending from heaven. Afterwards, he was left with the sacred wounds of Christ, known as "stigmata." The friar was the first person recognized to display this divine phenomenon. The bleeding holes in his hands, feet and side, would remain visible for the rest of his life.

In 1226 Francis became very sick from an unknown illness and died October 3 in Assisi; he was 44 years old. Just two years later, the friar was canonized as a saint by his former protector, Pope Gregory IX.

Due to his love for nature, statues of St. Francis are a common fixture in home gardens everywhere. In addition, the well-known *Prayer of St. Francis, Make me a Channel of Your Peace*, is one of the most beloved writings and has been translated into a popular hymn.

You may enjoy this music video of the song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vToimPtYGvU>

The Franciscan Volunteer Ministry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is a perfect example of the values taught by St. Francis of Assisi, to live simply and to help the sick, needy and poor.

(See story on page 3)



**Mt. La Verna Sanctuary
Site of Stigmata**