

Gifts of Grace Ministry Newsletter

November / December, 2014



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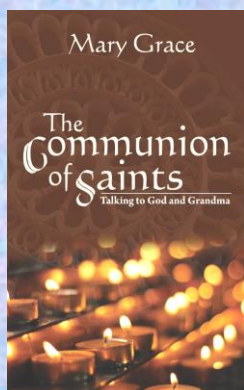
At Thanksgiving dinner, it's a tradition in our family for each of us to mention one or two things we are grateful for. Usually we are most thankful for our loved ones, our health, a job, a home, and for the bounty of food. It's interesting to note that the things that matter to us most are *not* our possessions. When we are gathered with family and friends, especially those we don't see often, the material things are not as important.

But what if there is an empty place at your dinner table this year? The holidays can be a cruel reminder of someone that is no longer a part of our life in the physical world. We can, however, use special occasions as a way to stay connected to our loved ones in spirit. Holidays can also provide us with an opportunity to actively participate in the grieving process, which will aid in healing.

One way is by setting a place at the dinner table for the one who is "missing" from the event. Although some of the adults might think this is strange, children often enjoy the "game." As dishes are being passed around, be sure to fill the designated plate with that person's favorite foods.

The first time I set a place for my mother, my siblings didn't say much, but gave me the rolled-eyes, crazy look. However, when I went to place some cranberry sauce on Mom's plate, my brother protested stating, "Don't you dare, Mom hated cranberries!" This began a lively conversation and debate, which lightened the mood and opened the door for further conversation about Mom. It turned a not-so-normal and sad day, into a fun event. After that, my nieces argued over who got to sit next to Grandma each holiday.

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Many will be spending Thanksgiving after surviving the loss of a home, good health or a job. Yet, there is always something to be grateful for. It is in our losses that we are forced to reflect on what is truly important. Part of my spiritual practice each night is simply counting my blessings. In my bedtime meditation, I always give thanks for the food I had to eat, the roof over my head, and a warm bed to sleep in. A large percentage of the world's population does not have these basic needs met on a daily basis. Therefore, not only am I grateful for the necessities, everything else is considered a bonus. Despite our losses, we need to focus on the "good" in our life, it's another way to help us heal.

Turning to another holiday, Christmas shopping can be one of the most difficult and saddest events, when you are grieving the loss of a loved one. One helpful practice is to shop for that person, just like past years. Take the time to find that unique item and then, either keep it for yourself, or give it to someone else. You can also purchase an ornament for the Christmas tree, or buy something special for the grave site, such as a wreath or an angel.

Here are some other ideas to help you through the holidays when suffering a loss: Participate in a fund-raising event, adopt-a-family to buy gifts for, go on a pilgrimage to a favorite spot, write a poem, sing a song, or simply go on a walk to reflect and remember. Make a new, annual tradition in memory of that person who will always hold a place in your heart.



There are many ways in which we can stay connected to our loved ones in spirit. Every little act of remembrance reminds us that our relationships never end, they merely change. Whether residing in heaven or on earth, remember all those who share in your life, give thanks, and celebrate the season. No matter where we live, we are all members of the communion of saints; love never dies.

Have a Wonderful Thanksgiving,
A Happy Hanukah & A Merry Christmas!

May the Saints be with you.
Love, Mary Grace

Upcoming Events

**National Teleseminar
For IANDS Group Leaders
(International Association of Near Death Studies)
Tuesday, November 18
6:00 -7:30pm (Pacific Time)
9:00 – 10:30pm (Eastern Time)**

**Exploring our Beliefs about God, Grace & Life After Death
Spiritual Development Workshop
with Keynote Speakers: Dave Bennett & Mary Grace
First Universalist Church of Central Square
Saturday, November 22
9:30am – 3:30pm / Central Square, NY**

The Spirits of Christmas

The Holidays can be a difficult time for those who have recently lost loved ones. Learn how to stay connected with your heavenly family and friends to help heal the grief. Consider hosting this special, educational, inspirational & interactive workshop:

- **Learn the Language of spirits through “signs.”**
- **Share your holiday memories & stories of after-death communications.**
- **Set up a “sign” with a loved one in heaven.**
- **Contact a spirit friend in a guided meditation.**

For more workshops & info go to: www.giftsofgraceministry.org

Or call Mary Grace @ 585-766-9318 or E-Mail: mgrace-888@outlook.com

News

New Friends & Orange County, California

My trip to California was simply amazing. I went to Orange County to do two presentations, two workshops, and four book signings. Since I was there for ten days, I had time to contact many bookstores to see if they would be interested in carrying *The Communion of Saints*. I'm thrilled to announce that the book is now available in five locations in California.

The Orange County locations for book are as follows: Catholic Books & Gifts in Fountain Valley, San Juan Capistrano Mission Bookstore in San Juan Capistrano, Awakenings Book store in Laguna Hills, School of Multidimensional Healing Arts & Science in Irvine, and Lido Village Bookstore in Newport Beach.

Besides peddling books, I also had the opportunity to go to Mass at St. Mathews Ecumenical Catholic Church in Irvine. I met up with a couple from Rochester, NY, Jerri Ann and Brian Peters. I had the good fortune of being at Mass for the Feast of St. Francis and the blessing of the animals. It was quite comical to attend a church service with dogs, birds, and even a tortoise. After Mass I was taken to lunch with Bishop Peter Hickman and my new friends; I was truly honored. Thanks so much to you all.

On another day, I had the opportunity to meet a first, second and third cousin, Sandy Eberhard, Catherine, and two-year old Avalon, who I never met before. This was my first trip to their part of the country, so I didn't know my California cousins. They treated me to lunch at a fabulous Japanese restaurant. Cousin Sandy invited me to California to visit, after she read *The Communion of Saints*. I owe a big thanks to my Aunt Marie Hochreiter, who sent the book to my cousin. That one, kind act let to an amazing west coast experience.



One of the most poignant memories of my California trip was the visit to San Juan Capistrano Mission. The 1820's Franciscan school is famous for the swallows migrating every spring on St. Joseph's Day. There was even a popular tune in the '50's, *When the Swallows Return to Capistrano*, which I remember Mom signing when I was a kid. One year, Mom and my Aunt Marie went to the mission when visiting their brother in Orange County. The trip was one of the highlights of my mother's life.

Having the opportunity to connect with Mom at this sacred place, with its beautiful gardens and chapel, was a true blessing. I lit a candle for her, as well as six other friends in spirit. I will always cherish that day. Thanks for the memories, Mom.

Thank You So Much!

It takes a village to write a book, and a whole country to market it. There were numerous earth angels who made my trip to California possible and left me with many great memories, along with lots of new friends. A big thank you goes out to the following saints:

- Robin Barr: for hosting me in her home for ten days, being my chauffer, marketing person, dinner companion, workshops host and IANDS leader. Most of all, I thank Robin for taking me to San Juan Capistrano, for her huge heart and great friendship.
- Michelle Ott: My beautiful house mate and friend: Thanks so much for the drive to Dana Point. Wading in the Pacific Ocean and watching the sunset was one of the highlights of my trip!
- Elizabeth McAdams: for hosting a presentation at the “Life After Life Club” and the International Foundation of Survival Research
- Frances Pullin: for hosting a workshop at the “School of Multidimensional Healing of Arts & Science.” Also, for selling our book in her bookstore.
- Lisa Brown-McCullough: for the connection to Lido Village Books.
- Father Jack McGinnis of Palm Desert: For attending my talk, lunch, and for the wonderful meeting afterwards.
- Julie-Ann Goode of “Psych 1on 1”: for having me as a guest on her radio show.
- Joe English, my cabbie: for the ride to church and from San Juan Capistrano Mission.
- To all of you who attended my workshops and presentations, purchased books, and took me out for lunch and dinner. It was an honor to meet so many wonderful people; you are true angels and saints.

Thanks to Mary Magdalen Catholic Church

In October I had the opportunity to give a presentation at a Mary Magdalen Church in East Rochester, NY. It was my first time presenting at a Catholic Church! The special evening was another milestone for me and I was truly honored. Thanks so much to Rev. Denise Donato, Caryl Marchand and Colleen Brown for inviting me and organizing the event. Thanks also to all who attended; it was another blessing.

If you have any questions or comments on this newsletter, or any related subject, please feel free to e-mail me at mgrace-888@outlook.com I love to read your feedback!

Featured Saint: Saint Nicholas of Myra

Feast Day: December 6

Patron Saint of Children



Nicholas who was born in 280 AD in the Greek village of Patara; it is now Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God, became a priest, and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man.

Nicholas came up with some creative ways to share his wealth with the poor. One story tells of a destitute man who had no dowry money to secure a husband for his three daughters. Unless they were married, the women were destined to a life of slavery. When Nicholas heard about this, his compassion drove him to save the girls from disgrace. On three separate nights he threw a bag of gold through the poor man's window. Some of the bags landed in stockings that were left before the fire to dry. The sisters found the gold and this led to the tradition of hanging stockings on Christmas.

Nicholas traveled the country helping people, giving gifts of money, and other presents. He became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, and his love for children. He did not like to be seen when he gave away gifts, so the children of the time were told to go to sleep quickly or he would not come! The custom remains to this day.

In the 17th century Dutch immigrants brought with them the legend of Sinter Klaas, which is the origin of Santa Clause. The old bishop's cloak and tall mitre hat were eventually replaced with a red suit and a stocking hat. Many of these images are rooted in Clement Moore's poem, *A Visit from Saint Nicholas*, also known as *Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Another major contributor to Santa's twentieth century look is due to the popular Coca Cola advertisements in the early 1900's.

St. Nicholas died on December 6, 343AD, which became a day of celebration known as the Feast of St. Nicholas. In European countries children put their shoes or stockings out the night before the holiday to be filled with candy and small treats. This custom is also honored in the United States by many cultures. Saint Nicholas was eventually named the patron saint of children; for this reason he is also known as Father Christmas.

Have a Happy St. Nicholas Day and a Merry Christmas!