

in a

# Word™

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**The Resurrection of Jesus Christ confounds  
the unbeliever but affirms and strengthens  
the faith and hope of those who believe.  
Happy Easter!**

Photo by Father James Pawlicki, STD

# ON CONVERTING A REVIVALIST

by Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

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Seven to seven and a half hours of highway always take on a fresh look when one sets out on another adventure to bring the Good News to a different Faith Community. The only drawback was that I was leaving at 5:40 Saturday evening instead of late morning, pushing back my arrival in Jackson MS to almost one in the morning (the old time).

The older I get, the more aware I am that I, the revivalist, am more on trial than the church members who listen to me. If there is any conversion to be made, any repentance to be done, I am the principal one who needs it first and must initiate it. Then and only then can I even remotely hope to light some kind of spark in hearers of the Word.

Unless I am totally convinced that I am preaching first to myself, then only secondarily to those seated or standing before me, my preaching is misguided and weak, and perhaps for the most part in vain. Paul's warning haunted me: "I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:27)

Perhaps unbeknown to themselves, revival attendees are looking for some sign in me that I am one of them, but one who has experienced a bit more than they or at least something more intense during my voyage. They are taking note of how I try to engage them by the sharing of my faith pilgrimage in hopes of enlightening and inspiring them.

"The Christians of Our Mother of Mercy Church in Forth Worth send greetings, best wishes and prayers to the Christians of Holy Ghost Church in Jackson!" I announced to them with a big smile. "Let us in turn pray for them during our time of revival."

Appropriately, the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus was being celebrated on that, the second Sunday of Lent. Shining there before us in the resplendent, dazzling Jesus was the ultimate goal of all our Lents, our penances, our crosses every day of our lives. What and where he is, we all hope and strive to be when God calls us home to himself.

That thought put a smile on everyone's face, as one could see their minds at work, picturing themselves, their beloved ancestors, their immediate family, their extended family, their Faith Family, their community and indeed the world swept up in the rapture.

"I don't refer to parish or church," their pastor, Father Darrell Kelly, S.V.D., likes to say. "I talk of our Faith Family, because we are indeed close like family."

Family indeed they are at Holy Ghost Church, an enduring hallmark of how the Divine Word fathers and

brothers have traditionally shaped their ministry of Faith Community. Outside after Mass, in the midst of the milling, hugging, glad-handing church members stood a pert, alert, beaming keenager who made a beeline for me.

"Father, I want to tell you that I have been reading your column for years, and I have paid close attention to and followed all that you write about avoiding animal products and eating a lot of vegetables and fruit. I am 87 years old." She leaned back proudly. "I have no pains of any kind, and I don't have to take any kind of medicine."

Putting it mildly, I was dumbfounded, but in the most delightful manner. She was hands down the oldest person who ever claimed to be a "student" of mine.

"Praise God!" I told her. "You are a most wonderful example of what a human being can do and be if one simply has the will to do and be so. I am so very happy for you, for your health and your marvelous life as a good person and a great Christian."

As she turned away still beaming, I was lost in thought. Up stepped our chauffeur, Shirley Lynch, who would drive Father Darrell Kelly and me to St. Stephen Church in Magee. Surprisingly, she was one of the altar servers at the Mass just ended. Very protective of her pastor, as were the other church members, she looked professional.

Well, as it turned out, she is very professional indeed. Belying her petite, lean figure, Shirley is a retired policewoman. Now she is a federal marshal who receives assignments around the country to keep order at court trials and various functions. With all that, she is still in hot pursuit of bettering herself with higher learning.

Preaching at Holy Ghost was tame. Not so at St. Stephen. A 7-year-old girl stood with her two sisters, eyeing me closely. Finally, she reached for my hand, then suddenly hugged me to mine and the delight of the laughing church members. The incident was to repeat itself almost identically during the revival Monday night at Holy Ghost.

Well, I did feel converted, changed forever by Father Darrell Kelly and his Faith Family. Sight unseen, there was the strange apparition of the Duct Tape Cadillac which glided past my Toyota Corolla about an hour out of Jackson on my way home. The older-model Cadillac struck a strange pose as it tooled down the highway with six large strips of duct tape plastering down the car's trunk and generous strips holding loose windows in check.

Yes, you're right. That sight was a meditation all to itself, evoking many thoughts of the underclass, the poor and the determined who make do with whatever they have. And, yes, the revivalist had been converted a bit more on his journey to our Father's kingdom.

# Father Melvin Meets an Angel

by  
Brother Dennis Newton, SVD

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*"I was ill and you comforted me,  
in prison and you came to visit me."  
(Matt 25: 36)*

Remember when Clark Kent would dash into a phone booth and emerge as Superman? Mary Clarke went to a Mexican prison and never emerged. She was transformed, though, and became "Mother Antonia," a super-servant of the poor. Her home, a barren prison cell, is no bigger than a phone booth.

Two Washington Post reporters tell the compelling story of the former Beverly Hills socialite-turned-nun in *The Prison Angel*, published by Penguin Books. **Mary Clarke was fifty years old, twice-divorced and the mother of seven grown children when she felt called to full-time ministry to prisoners in the sprawling Tijuana prison called "La Mesa." That's when her new life as Mother Antonia began.**

**After receiving official approval from the Church, Mother Antonia founded a religious community for women who wanted to enter religious life later in life. The community is named "Servants of the Eleventh Hour."**



Father Melvin James  
and Mother Antonia

oners, whom the guards had separated up against the fence. He had done something. She tried to give him a kiss because she kisses everybody and he pulled back. And then she got close to his ear

Mother Antonia cares for prisoners, guards, administrators and police. She was featured in an article in *The Tidings*, the Catholic newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Fr. Melvin James SVD recalls one of his first encounters with Mother Antonia: "Mother walked up to the fiercest-looking, tattooed, 'big scar down the side of his face' pris-

and she said something. I don't know what she said, but the man just broke down. I mean, he turned into a puddle. And it all happened in less than a minute."

When Fr. Melvin read a Reader's Digest article about Mother Antonia's work in the Mexican prison, he felt compelled to learn more. His first visit with her cemented his desire to work full-time in the prison ministry. Fr. Melvin originally from Washington, DC had been a pastor for many years, serving in Chicago, Mexico and most recently in Los Angeles.



Mother collects soap, blankets, medicine and clothes for the prison-

ers. She does as much as she can to make their life in prison as safe and healthy as possible. But she also worries about what happens to prisoners when they are released. That is where Mother Antonia invited Father Melvin to focus.

Often times, men from the prison are released late at night with nowhere to go, nothing to eat and no mechanism to help them contact their families and begin the process of reintegration into society.

Fr. Melvin opened a house in Tijuana where the recently released men spend a night or a few nights while they get in touch with their families and find a way to return home. He uses all of his skills and training as a priest, nurse, counselor and even tailor to help these struggling men. The project, called "My Father's House," opened in 2007.



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## in a word or two

The ***SYMPOSIUM ON DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDRAISING*** sponsored by The National Black Catholic Congress has been canceled. The symposium scheduled for May 28-30, 2009 in Indianapolis was canceled due to minimum registrations.

Deacon Al Turner, a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Washington and former ABC News cameraman, has been named the director of the archdiocese's Office of Black Catholics, with responsibility to coordinate ministry to Catholics of African ancestry, working closely with parishes and archdiocesan staff.



Approximately 100,000 Catholics in the 580,000 member archdiocese are of African descent. They include families with deep local roots as well as new immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. As executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Black Catholics, Deacon Turner succeeds Msgr. Ray East, nationally known evangelist and speaker. Father East returns to full time pastoring of St. Theresa of Avila church in Washington, DC.

**An estimated 92,000 inactive Catholics in the Phoenix Diocese have come back to the church in the last year thanks in large part to a groundbreaking television advertising campaign called *Catholics Come Home*.**

The promotional spots featured people and locations from around the Phoenix Diocese to promote the church during prime-time television. The cornerstone of the campaign, the Catholics Come Home Web site, addresses often misunderstood aspects of the faith.

"For those who had fallen away from the practice of their faith, it let them know that we want them to come home," Phoenix Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted said. The commercials, which ran during Lent in 2008, detail the good works of the Catholic Church throughout history. They also offer real-life testimonials of local fallen-away Catholics explaining what turned them away and what drew them back. Web site is [www.catholicscomehome.org](http://www.catholicscomehome.org)

One of the finest websites on mission work can be found at [www.svdmissions.org](http://www.svdmissions.org). The site offers up to date news of missions throughout the world along

with many videos of the missions in various countries. Well worth viewing.

Bishop J. Terry Steib, SVD, Bishop of Memphis, Tennessee, has written a wonderful Pastoral letter on Joy. Titled ***Living Our Catholicism, That Our Joy May Be Complete***, Bishop Steib hopes that together as a Church, people will search for and find again the true joy that can be found in the Catholic way of life.

The Pastoral is a 32 page booklet that comes with discussion questions for each of the sections of the pastoral for use by discussion groups in parishes. A copy of the letter can be found on the Diocese of Memphis web site [www.cdom.org](http://www.cdom.org)

Bishop Steib in the conclusion to the letter states the purpose of his writing. He says....

"In this pastoral letter I have challenged all of us to move more deeply into living as faithful Catholics in every aspect of our lives. If we continue to explore the joy that comes from living out the Catholic way of life, I believe that we will begin to understand the totality of what it means to be a Catholic in the 21st Century. As we live as true disciples, we will find the joy that is an inherent part of being Catholic and that joy will draw people to ask us the source of our joy. When others question us about our faith because they see joy in us, then we can become Philip to their Nathaniel and say, as Philip did about Jesus, Come and see."

**The Archbishop Lyke Conference will be held June 18 to 21, 2009 in New Orleans, Louisiana.**

The theme of the Conference will be "In Christ All is New". The conference features music, liturgical dance workshops. The Lyke Conference is a spiritually uplifting experience that is a must for those ministering our parishes. For more information go to: [www.LykeConference.com](http://www.LykeConference.com)

**The Josephite Pastoral Center celebrates its 40th Anniversary on April 25, 2009** at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, DC. Congratulations to the visionaries and hard workers who have made this Center so valuable to African American Catholics and the Church.

**Divine Word Missionaries** is an international missionary community of over 6,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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