

# Blessings

SACRAMENTORS®: A Process of Sanctification for Catholic Men and Women

March, 2005

## REPENTANCE

by Father Bob Camuso

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### Upcoming Events

**Retreat with  
Fr. Bob & Lory**  
June 24 & 25, 2005  
Palisades Retreat Center  
For details, see enclosed  
flyer

**Annual Picnic**  
Sun, July 17, 2005  
1:00 to 5:00 p.m.  
Seahurst Beach  
Burien

**4<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Leadership Retreat**  
Sat., Sept. 10, 2005  
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Palisades Retreat Center

**Community  
Meeting Schedule**  
on website  
[www.sacramentors.org](http://www.sacramentors.org)

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*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” – Matthew 4:17*

I can't imagine a more old-fashioned religious word than “repent.” It's not a word we hear used much anymore by priests. I don't recall the last time I used it in a homily!

The best definition I've found for “repentance” is what is said to us on Ash Wednesday as a priest or minister rubs ashes on our foreheads: “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.” This is a call to action to change our attitude, to resist evil and to aspire to a happier life. But it's unlikely we're going to respond to this call to action unless we first experience God's unconditional love for us and desire to see us safe from harm. Blessed Henry Suso put it this way in the 14<sup>th</sup> century:

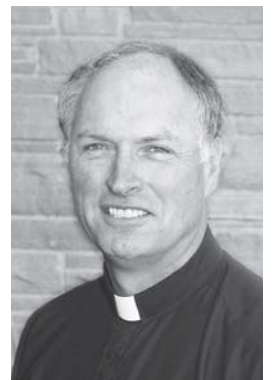
*No mother could snatch her child from a burning building  
more swiftly than God is compelled to forgive a penitent soul,  
even though it should have committed every sin in the world  
a thousand times over.*

Yet, for most of us the problem with repentance is not a lack of knowing God loves us or that we are forgiven when we repent. Our problem is getting off the roller coaster ride of sinning and then being forgiven. God's love and forgiveness pulls us up from sin and gives us great potential for goodness. Then the gravity of our choice to sin takes us down that thrill-ride to the bottom.

But when do we get off the roller coaster? When do we simply stop repeating the same sins over and over? When do we return from an unnatural state of sin to a natural state of grace?

I believe the roller coaster stops when we take responsibility for our mistakes. Not just by confessing our sins, making an act of contrition and doing penance, but by no longer committing that sin. This requires discipline and effort. And it requires the grace of God, because we cannot save ourselves without God's help.

Still, many of us believe it's impossible for us to change. After all, we've been committing the same sin all our



Father Bob Camuso

(cont. page 2)

lives. It has become a habit, an addiction. We tell ourselves we can't help it. But is that voice speaking our true self? Certainly, it's not Jesus. Most likely it's the evil one, the one who has us on the roller coaster and doesn't want us off. It's the one who knows we enjoy the thrill of the ride down even though at the bottom we're contrite and wish we'd made a different choice. Yet, God keeps pulling us back up, hoping that one day we will come to our senses and end the cycle of sin that keeps us down.

What is the one sin in your life that you repeat over and over? Up and down the roller coaster you have gone for years and you've convinced yourself there can be no end to this behavior. But is that really true? Saint Augustine wrote, "Before God can deliver us we must undeceive ourselves." It's a deception to believe that there's no hope for you to change. Jesus doesn't believe that about you. Why should you?

Another common deception is that we think our sin is really not a sin. Even though it may go against God's law of love, it's really not sinful because we can justify our behavior, or somehow we're an exception to the rule. But the author of the First Letter of John disagrees: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1:8

And so, why not resolve this day that through discipline and effort we are going to repent and get off the roller coaster of sin. Others have tried this before us and have succeeded. They are not just the saints, but our parents, grandparents and other ordinary people we have known and loved.

What might happen if you made a choice today to turn away from that one sin that takes you down? What joy might you discover as you find yourself living your life faithful to the gospel and in a natural state of grace?

FR. BUTL



*Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Romans 12:2

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MISSION STATEMENT

*"To create in parishes  
small faith communities  
of men and of women  
committed to supporting  
each other in living  
a Christian life  
characterized by  
acts of love, kindness,  
appreciation, and  
forgiveness."*

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## SACRAMENTOR BOARD MEMBERS

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When he returned he found them asleep.  
He said to Peter,  
"Simon, are you asleep?  
Could you not keep watch for one hour?  
Watch and pray that you  
may not undergo the test.  
The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."  
Mk. 14: 37-38

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last year during Lent, I remember reading the above scripture and feeling like Jesus was posing his questions to me. I heard Him asking me if I was asleep spiritually and why I wasn't willing to make the effort to spend at least one hour a day with him in prayer and study. In response, I thought up many excuses why I couldn't pray and study scripture more, but Jesus' question kept coming back to me, "Jeff, could you not keep watch for one hour?" Finally, I set aside my ego's protests and excuses and dedicated myself to keeping watch with Jesus for an hour a day. That decision has had a profound impact on my life. Starting each day with prayer, to include time listening for God to speak to me, always serves to remind me how much God loves me and that Christ is always with me. I have seen my relationship with God reach a new level because, like any relationship, the best way to improve and deepen my relationship with God is to spend time with Him.

As we approach the end of Lent, I would encourage each of you to reflect on Christ's words to Peter. Is our Lord directing those questions to you? Have you fallen asleep spiritually such that you are just "going through the motions?" Do you spend dedicated time each day with Jesus? Examine how you spend your time. How much time do you spend watching TV or engaging in other meaningless activities and how much time do you spend with our Lord? Such a self examination will help clarify where you have set your priorities. If you find that your relationship with God has taken a back seat to other pursuits, then take the steps necessary to change that. Make the commitment to spend time each day with our Lord in prayer and in scripture study. Perhaps your Apostles Group can make this commitment together and then share each week how well each of you are doing in meeting that commitment.

Our Lord is calling each of us to spend time with Him. Can you not "keep watch" for an hour with Him each day? I know God will bless you abundantly for answering that question with a resounding, "Yes, Lord, I can!"

Jeff

# FEAR & Courage

By Craig Schlattmann

One of the central truths that SacraMentors teaches us is the idea that fear is a tool the ego uses to convince us of our separation from both God and from our brothers and sisters. The ego offers us fear of God's wrath for past failures and fear of the future in the form of worry to convince us that it (the ego) and not God has the plan that will save us. Unfortunately, we all too often buy into the ego's offering of fear, setting ourselves up for the shame and guilt that follow (in other words, the unholy triangle).

Fear is not of God, but as I reflect on my life, I know there have been times that I've let fear control me, preventing me from accepting His love, paralyzing me when I was called by God to follow Him. Yet our Lord repeatedly implores his disciples to "Fear not!" calling us into action beyond our fears.

Courage has been defined by many not as the absence of fear, but the ability to act despite the presence of fear. As Christians, courage is a vital virtue needed to act upon the faith we profess. As Sacramentors, courage is essential to break the chain of the unholy triangle, allowing us to accept the love our God and our brothers and sisters in Christ offer us.

If you're like me, there have been times that courage has seemed elusive, when the ego's siren call to fear blared in my ears and in my heart, when my own internal store of courage seemed empty and long unused. It's especially at these times that I've asked both myself and my God, where is my courage? Fortunately our Lord provides us many sources of courage; if we are able to look, we'll find it all around us!

One constant source of courage is His Word. For example, in the Psalms we find David, a man after God's own heart, sharing with Him his fears, yet always reaching the conclusion that God is his strength, his savior. One verse that has spoken to my heart is from Psalms 31, "I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul." A more liberal version of the same verse said God has "listened to my troubles and (has) seen the crisis in my soul." What better description of fear can there be than "anguish" and "crisis" of soul! The chapter finishes with this en-courage-ment, "Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord." Listen closely to the Liturgy of the Word or open your Bible and notice how many times God approaches His people with the words "Fear not!"

Another wellspring of courage is the example of the mighty men and women of faith through whose lives God showed His power and His love. Again, the Bible is an obvious source with a multitude of stories centered around God's courageous servants. Open the Old Testament and read about such people as David, Moses, Nehemiah, Ester, Suzanna, and so many others. In the New Testament, the lives of the Saints unfold beginning with Mary, the Mother of God. Imagine the courage present in Mary's heart when as a young woman she offered her "yes" to God's call to become the mother of our Lord! Or Joseph's "yes" to his call to become Mary's husband and the earthly father of her son, Jesus. Or the Apostles' "yes" to Christ's call to leave all behind and follow Him.

Even the Apostles' early fears and Jesus' response to them have been a source of en-courage-ment for God's people. For example, a repeated popular scene from early Christian art is Peter's denial at the well of Christ after His arrest. As Christians in Roman times faced severe persecutions, their own fears undoubtedly overwhelmed many of them, causing them to deny their faith rather than face persecutions, suffering and death. Yet the story of Peter's denial at the well is not so much a tale of failure as it is a story of Jesus' ever-present love, for when Jesus met Peter after His resurrection and restored their relationship, he also restored Peter's courage. Christ's love overcame Peter's moment of fearfulness, and became an example of hope to all who experience failure because of fear.

In his new book, "Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way," our Pope John Paul II speaks of the need for models to imitate, and notes that these models are all the more moving when displayed in the lives of saints from recent times. In the book's final chapter entitled "God and Courage," *Il Papa* shares his joy in recalling the heroic faith and virtue presented in the lives of saints and martyrs from his native land of Poland, and especially from his home archdiocese of Krakow. Their lives are for him a source of strength and protection.

By far the most empowering source of courage I've found in recent times has been the love of my brothers in our SacraMentor's Apostles Group. My fears hold power over me when they stay hidden in the dark, but when I've exposed those fears to the light of fellowship with my Apostle's Group brothers, I've been set free from the power my fears held over me. Sharing my fears, and the pain they cause me, has allowed

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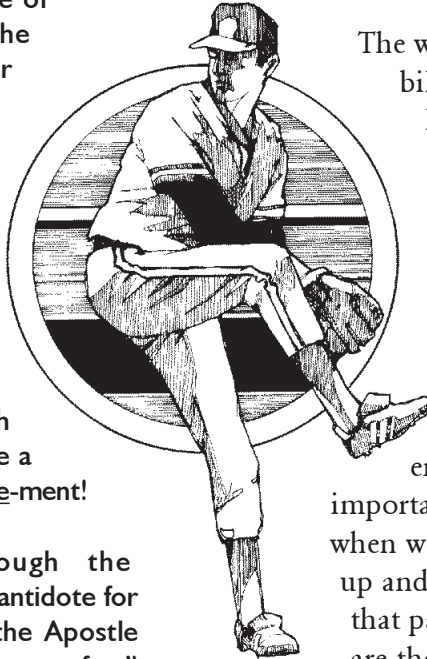
◆  
PERFECT  
LOVE  
DRIVES  
OUT  
FEAR

I John 4:18  
◆

## Father John Madigan Throws a Curve

By Bruce Jaeger, St. John Vianney

me to release them, and “accept the healing and love” both Jesus and my brothers offer me. The love of Jesus, expressed through the love of my SacraMentor brothers, has been my most trusted source of strength and courage as I grow in faith. Even after months of absence from my group (due to my move away from the Puget Sound area) I know their prayers and their love are with me, just as mine is with them. I find this reality to be a constant source of en-courage-ment!



As we've learned through the SacraMentor's program, the antidote for fear is love. In 1 John 4, the Apostle John tells us, “Perfect love drives out fear” (verse 18) and “if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us” (verse 12). As Sacramentors, we are called to love one another through fulfilling our function as children of God, to bless and be a blessing to others. It is when we acknowledge and accept this function that we abide in love, a perfect love that drives out fear. So our choice, while not easy, is simple - accept the fear our ego offers us, or accept God's love while fulfilling our function to bless and be a blessing. As we've learned, it is by sharing God's love with the world that we learn of God's love for us. When we strive for perfecting that love, we find that fear will no longer rule us but has become powerless against us. As a result, we are able to break the unholy triangle by replacing our worry and anger with peace, and our shame with happiness.

Just as Jesus walked upon the waters to quell the fears of His disciples as they were tossed about by the wind and waves of a storm at sea, He searches after us in the midst of our storms and offers the same en-courage-ment to us that he offered to them (Mark 6:50), “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!”

The winter Sacramentum at St. Andrew parish in Sumner was billed as an encore of Fr. John Madigan's popular talk from last year, “Lent - Spring Training for Catholics,” but the Holy Spirit had a different plan. Instead of giving his original talk, Fr. John was inspired to lead us into Lent in a different way, and with great results.

Before his main talk, Fr. John taught us a new way to look at the saints. Not only are they tremendous role models, but they were real people who want us to join them in heaven. Father John suggested that we envision the saints like fans at a sporting event with one important exception - they root for us at all times but never boo when we make a mistake. Rather, they encourage us to get back up and carry on. We were encouraged to pray to the saint for that particular day and to pray to our patron saint because they are there to help us as well.

The main subject of Fr. John's talk was a course in “Christian Anthropology.” The presentation was very interesting and insightful. The main point was that we need to work to get to the “core” of our souls where our “true self” exists and where we can be more fully united with God. God wants us to go to the core so that He can tell us how much He loves us and that we are His beloved. Father John explained that we get to the core through prayer and quiet listening. It is through those practices that God is able to tell us how much He does, in fact, love us.

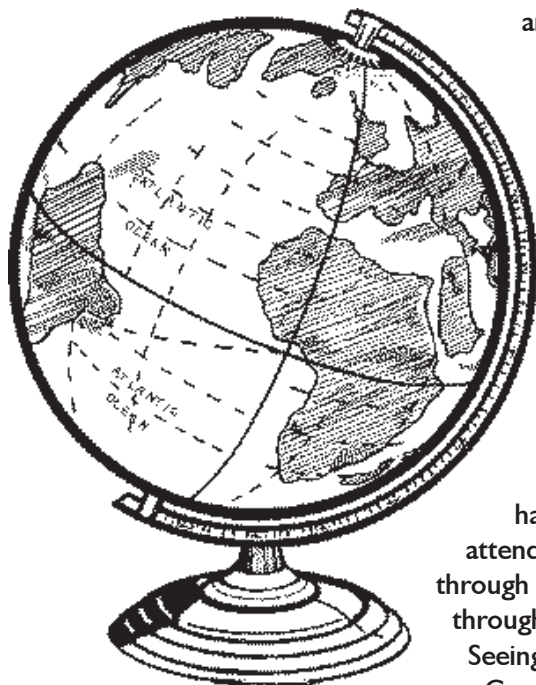
Father John also mentioned that Lent provides us the opportunity to exercise the discipline necessary to get into the core. Father John highly recommended Eucharistic adoration and frequent reception of the Eucharist as important methods of getting closer to God. We also should spend more time in prayer, connecting with God from the time we get up in the morning, and remember throughout the day that He is always with us. Similar to last year's talk, Fr. John again advised us to set aside regular time each day for prayer and reading the Word of God.

At one point during the evening, Fr. John said that, “The Spirit will lead each person in different ways.” For those who attended the Sacramentum, it was a blessing that each of us was led to be there that night and that the Spirit led Fr. John to help show us how to get to the core of our souls. Thanks, Fr. John, for your willingness to be led by the Spirit!

# MAKING A BETTER WORLD

By Jeff Virgin & Denise Smith, Senior Parish Coordinators

Over the past few months, Denise and I have been visiting your Apostles groups. We would like to thank you for your hospitality and sharing with us during these meetings. We also want to share some of our experiences and insights from these visits with the entire community of SacraMentors. First, we present some numbers to give everyone a better sense of our community. There are 15 women's groups, which range from 3 to 9 active members. On the men's side, there are 29 active groups, each with 2-9 active members. All told, there are over 300 active SacraMentors in the Archdiocese. As new training series are ongoing, that number continues to grow. The groups stretch geographically from Vancouver in the south to Bellingham in the north, and from Enumclaw in the east to Gig Harbor in the west. The groups meet at many different times, including Sunday morning and evening, every weekday evening, some weekday mornings, and Saturday morning.



There are several messages that we want everyone to appreciate in this information. First, although your group may seem small to you, SacraMentors is a large and growing community. At any given time, there is likely to be a SacraMentors Apostles Group meeting and praying, or doing a service project somewhere in the archdiocese. Second, it only takes two SacraMentors to make an Apostles Group. This is important for small groups to realize. If a group starts to dwindle in active members, the remaining members may become discouraged, which can sometimes result in the group disbanding altogether. This is what happened to my own group at St. James Parish in Seattle. I was very inspired to learn of groups that have continued to meet for more than a year, even with only two regular attendees. In some cases, these groups have had a new influx of members through a new training series in their parish, mentoring in new members, and through reaching out to members who have stopped attending the meetings. Seeing this happen has inspired me to try and revive the St. James Apostles Group. Despite the natural tendency for individual members to vary in their level of activity, SacraMentors has a life of its own and continues to grow.

The content of the meetings for different groups varies in emphasis. The universally common aspect is sharing. Denise and I have heard and shared some very moving testimonies about the struggles of our earthly life and the power of the Holy Spirit to help us in times of need. We have also heard how God blesses each of us, and how easy it is to overlook those blessings. A great value of our meetings is that they prompt us to think about God's blessings in our lives. For study, groups vary greatly in their approach. A sampling includes: each individual shares briefly something that they have learned during the week from their private study or in another group; a discussion of the week's scripture passages; discussing a chapter in a book that they are reading together (in one case this included watching a movie and doing an accompanying workbook together); discussion of the day's reading from the Book of Kindness; and reading poetry written by one of the members. This diversity in study makes us a very rich community of knowledge. The service activities also varied from individual to group activities. Many groups have taken advantage of opportunities to support a community SacraMentors activity, such as a Sacramentum, a training series, or a breakfast meeting. Some groups have done a collective activity of parish or community service. One group provides a monthly Saturday morning pancake breakfast. Another group took an innovative approach by helping each other with home projects, such as gardening or carpentry. These activities, including the social gatherings associated with them, which often include families, help foster a strong bond between the group members.

The most profound revelation that I have gained from the visits is that we are truly making a better world. I have heard firsthand from many of you how you apply the SacraMentor principles of humility and blessing in your interactions, whether you are in your car on the highway, at work, (cont. pg 7)

# Stewardship Campaign '05 - What is God Calling You to Do?

By Ron Reiersen, Financial Advisor

at home, shopping, at Mass, or just walking along the street. We are different people, and we are making a different world, because we are SacraMentors. Each week, we remind each other that God is our best friend. We are helping each other live with more kindness and generosity. I have heard the joy in your voices (and in my own voice) when we tell of an incident that demonstrated SacraMentor principles at work. Imagine how much the world improves each time this happens. Imagine how great the world would be if all people were guided by these principles. I encourage each of us to look around and find someone who would be receptive to this transformation, and invite them to join us.

Of course, our transformation is a work in progress. So we tell each other of our pain when we let our egos take over. And we are frustrated that our egos continue to drive us to make the same mistakes repeatedly. One member suggested that we number our mistakes so that we can save time in sharing by just calling out the numbers for the week. Changing a way of approaching life that we learned from childhood and practiced most of our adult lives will be a gradual process. Like any great athlete trying to achieve success, we must practice daily, and we must get up after our defeats and keep practicing. Jesus rose after the greatest defeat of all to empower us to overcome our separation from God. Now we are helping each other to follow His example.

It is that time of year again when we begin our annual Stewardship Campaign. This is our third fund raising effort and thanks to your past generosity, we are on firm, financial ground. Because of your willingness to return to God a portion of the treasures he has bestowed on you, over the past two and a half years the Holy Spirit has increased our active membership by about 35% and our Apostles Groups by about 45%! Despite that growth, we continue to endeavor to bring Sacramentors to more parishes within our archdiocese and

eventually, to other areas of the country. The logistics of taking our training series "on the road" has led us to begin the process of creating a DVD of Fr. Bob Camuso and Lory Misel presenting the talks from our four-week long spirituality series. This DVD would be used to take SacraMentors to remote regions using one or two trainers as facilitators, to train new trainers and to provide refresher training to existing SacraMentors. We are also in the process of updating our web page to expand its capabilities and make it even more user-friendly.

To accomplish the above obviously requires funding. Currently, we depend on your stewardship to provide over 80% of our income. That is why we are once again asking all of you to prayerfully consider how God is asking each of you to support SacraMentors. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is calling you to include SacraMentors as part of your regular tithing. Or perhaps you are being called to make a one-time only contribution. Then again, the Spirit may be asking you to include the SacraMentors movement in your daily prayers. All we ask is that you prayerfully consider how God is calling you to support our effort to spread God's message of love, forgiveness, blessing and appreciation and then to have the courage to say "Yes" to God's prompting.

◆  
*Consider how*

*God is  
calling you  
to support  
our effort  
to spread*

*God's message  
of love,  
forgiveness,  
blessing and  
appreciation...*

◆

How do you make a commitment? By now, many of you have been asked by your parish coordinator to complete a commitment card. Shortly, those who have not been approached by their parish coordinator will receive a commitment card in the mail. When you receive the card, please spend some time asking for God's guidance concerning how He is calling you to support SacraMentors and then return the card in the enclosed envelope.

On behalf of the board, thanks again for your past generosity and for your willingness to ask God what He is calling you to do in response to our latest Stewardship Campaign.

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# SPIRITUALITY SERIES SCHEDULE

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## **SacraMentor Series**

**All Series are held on:  
Sundays, 2:00 to 5:00 pm**  
*(unless otherwise indicated)*

■ **MEN'S SERIES**

St. John Vianney, Kirkland  
April 10, 17 & 24

■ **WOMEN'S SERIES**

Holy Family, Kirkland  
April 10, 17 and 24

## **Saturday Sanctum**

**All Sanctums are held on:  
Saturdays, 9:00 am to 7:30 pm**

■ **MEN'S SANCTUM**

St. John Vianney, Kirkland  
April 30

■ **WOMEN'S SANCTUM**

Holy Family, Kirkland  
April 30

## **SacraMentors®**

c/o Jeff Smith, Executive Director  
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