



# **OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH**

## **Boca Grande, Florida**

Father Anthony Hewitt, Pastor

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 181, Boca Grande, Florida 33921

(941) 964 - 2254

Mass Schedule:

Daily (except Saturday)	8:00 A.M.
Saturday Vigil	5:00 P.M.
Sunday	9:00 & 10:30 A.M.
Confessions: Saturday	By Appointment
Web address:	<a href="http://ourladyofmercy.church">ourladyofmercy.church</a>
OnlineGiving:	<a href="https://ourladyofmercy.church">https://ourladyofmercy.church</a>

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**THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**JANUARY 21, 2024**

### **UPCOMING TV MASSES**

This **Tuesday January 23, at 1:00 pm** we will record two TV Masses for the Diocese to be shown for the homebound and those in hospitals, assisted living facilities and prisons. These TV Masses are a practical way to share our Eucharistic faith with those who need to remain connected to the mystical body of the Church. Please come and join us to celebrate the Fifth and Sixth Sundays in Ordinary Time. Our celebration will be seen the world over. God bless.

### **WEDDING ANNIVERSARY MASS**

All couples celebrating 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, or more than 50 years of marriage are invited by Bishop Frank J. Dewane to an Anniversary Mass in their honor. The Anniversary Masses will be celebrated in two locations: 11 a.m., Saturday, February 3 at St. Leo the Great Parish, 28290 Beaumont Road, Bonita Springs, and 11:00 a.m., Saturday, February 24 at Epiphany Cathedral, 350 Tampa Avenue West, Venice. Please contact the parish office for reservations no later than one week before the event you choose to attend. Our telephone number is 941-964-2254.

### **OFFICE OF FAMILY LIFE / JESUS AND THE EUCHARIST VIDEO SERIES**

Jesus and the Eucharist is a seven-part video series in partnership with the Augustine Institute, the USCCB, and the National Eucharistic Congress. Learn more about the Jesus and the Eucharist Series and access the first video in English and Spanish (and many other video and audio resources) on the USCCB Learn Platform with the National Eucharistic Revival, web address: [eucharisticrevival.org/jesus-and-the-eucharist?](http://eucharisticrevival.org/jesus-and-the-eucharist?)

### **2024 LENTEN SCHEDULE**

February 14 **Ash Wednesday**-Mass at 8:00 am and 5:00 pm

**Fridays** during Lent-Stations of the Cross at 4:00 pm

**Tuesdays** during Lent at 10:00 am-Holy Hour of adoration and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS – SAVE-THE-DATE:**

- February 9<sup>th</sup> – Mardi Gras – Jambalaya – Parish Life Center
- March 1st - Fish Fry – Parish Life Center
- March 4<sup>th</sup> - Boca Grande Preschool – Beach Ball – Gasparilla Inn Beach Club
- March 14th - St Patrick's Day -Corned Beef – Parish Life Center (**REVISED DATE**)
- April 12th – Barbecue – Parish Life Center

**Parish Dinners** - Four parish dinners are planned for this spring in the OLM Parish Life Center. All parishioners are invited. Dinners will be from 5 to 7 PM and will be catered by JT Turner and the cost will be \$45/person. Seating is limited to 120 per event and tickets will be available in advance ONLY. For the upcoming Mardi Gras Dinner, tickets will be sold after masses on January 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> or at the rectory on Tuesday and Thursday. (Cash or check). BYOB, water and soda will be provided. Volunteers needed for night of the event and to provide cookies/bars. Please contact Angela Steffan 941-855-1277 or [aksteffan@gmail.com](mailto:aksteffan@gmail.com) to volunteer.

## **FOOD PANTRY**

Please remember the food pantry at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grove City. They are always in need of non-perishable (and unopened) food items. Please place donated items in the plastic bin under the table inside the church. To give you some helpful hints, they are in need of canned vegetables, canned fruit, laundry detergent. Thank you for your support.

## **PRAYER FOR PEACE**

Lord of all, in this time of strife and suffering, we come before you with heavy hearts, seeking your divine intervention. We lift up to you the victims of the Holy Land conflict, asking for your mercy and healing touch.

Prince of Peace, grant solace to those who are in pain, strength to those who are weary and hope to those who are in despair. Let your guiding light shine upon all, that they may find a path to reconciliation and understanding.

Mary, Mother of Mercy, wrap your mantle of love around those who are suffering, and intercede for them before your Son. May your gentle compassion be a source of comfort and consolation. We implore you, O God, to inspire leaders and all involved to seek avenues of peace and dialogue. Soften hearts that are hardened by hatred and division and instill in them a desire for unity and harmony.

St. Francis of Assisi, patron of peace, pray for us. Help us to be instruments of your peace in this troubled world. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we pray. Amen.

## **January 25: The Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle**

c. 33–34

Patron Saint of missionaries, evangelists, writers, public workers, ropemakers, saddle makers, and tentmakers

Invoked against hailstorms and snakebites

*For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed. ~1 Corinthians 15:9–11*

Paul was born a Jew in the Roman city of Tarsus, in modern-day Turkey. On the eighth day, he was circumcised and received the Hebrew name Saul. At a young age, Saul began to study the Law of Moses in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin and one of the most respected Pharisees and Doctors of the Law of his era. The Pharisees had enumerated 613 laws found within the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Saul would have studied each of these laws carefully.

When Saul was in his early twenties, Jesus of Nazareth began His public ministry during which He challenged the rigid interpretations that the Pharisees taught about the Law of Moses. Jesus was crucified three years later when Saul was about twenty-five. Now a Pharisee himself, Saul was diametrically opposed to Jesus' teachings, believing that they were in opposition to the Law of Moses that he had come to know so well through the distorted lens of the pharisaical teachings. After Jesus' crucifixion, Saul zealously devoted himself to persecuting those who were Jesus' followers. Even when his own teacher, Gamaliel, recommended the followers of Jesus be ignored, Saul could not hold himself back.

The earliest documented martyrdom in the Church after Jesus' death took place with Saul's consent, when those who stoned Saint Stephen laid their cloaks at Saul's feet as Saul looked on. After that, Saul received a letter of permission from the high priest in Jerusalem to go beyond the city, searching from house to house to arrest those who followed Jesus, bringing them back in chains to stand trial in Jerusalem. As he took this letter of permission with him on a journey to Damascus, Saul had an experience that would not only change his life forever but also change the entire world.

"On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' He said, 'Who are you, sir?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:3–5). With that, Saul was blinded and had to be led into the city of Damascus, where he stayed for three days, fasting, praying, and pondering this encounter.

In that city was a disciple of Jesus named Ananias. Ananias knew about Saul's persecution of the Church and feared him greatly. But Jesus appeared to Ananias and told him to go to Saul, lay his hands on him, heal him, and baptize him. Jesus explained that "this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15–16). Ananias did as he was instructed, and Saul listened, converted, was baptized, and began a new life as an apostle of the Lord Jesus. Eventually Saul began to use his Roman name "Paul" rather than his Hebrew name "Saul."

Our feast today not only celebrates Saint Paul, but it also specifically celebrates his conversion. Think about that glorious conversion. Those three days that Saul spent in Damascus after encountering Jesus on the road changed his life.

During those three days, he pondered Jesus' words, fasted, prayed, listened, thought, and changed. Facing the truth within his soul might not have been easy, but he did it. From that time on, the zeal that he had poured into persecution became zeal for the spreading of the Gospel.

The first three years after his conversion were spent in Arabia, perhaps in prayer, study, and preparation for his new mission. God used this time of solitude to bring about a deeper conversion in Saul's heart and to form him into a powerful instrument. After three years, he returned to Damascus and then continued to travel far and wide, proclaiming Jesus as the Christ.

Over the approximately twenty-seven years that followed, Paul arguably became the greatest evangelist in the history of the world. At least thirteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books are traditionally attributed to Paul, providing us with much of what we know about Jesus. His letters are not only historical in nature, but they are also rich in theology, providing the sturdiest foundation for all that we believe as Christians today. Paul personally founded more than a dozen Christian communities during his missionary travels, but the members of those communities then went forth to found many more, making Paul not only a spiritual father to many early Christians but also a spiritual grandfather to countless others. He was tireless in his efforts, despite enduring much suffering:

*Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure (2 Corinthians 11:25–27).*

In his mid-fifties, Paul was arrested and spent years in prison. Being a Roman citizen, he appealed to Rome and was eventually sent there for trial. In Rome, he suffered martyrdom at around the age of sixty, possibly as a result of the persecutions of the Emperor Nero. Though we do not know for certain how he died, tradition states that he was beheaded with a sword.

It's easy to see Saint Paul in the bright light of all that he accomplished. But one truth we must never forget is that he was only a man. He was a man who experienced a profound conversion and dedicated the rest of his life to the will of God. Saint Paul must be a model for each of us. As we ponder his conversion today, think about your own conversion. If you are not as zealous for God as was Saint Paul, work to change that. You are just as capable of living a radical Christian life as was Saint Paul. Allow God to fill you with zeal so that God may use you in glorious ways.



**FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**  
*The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida*

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**Statement on the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children January 22, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our fidelity to Christ calls us to uphold and protect the inviolable dignity and sanctity of all human life from the moment of conception until natural death. Great progress has been made in recent years to protect women and their preborn children in Florida. That progress, as noted below, is at great risk.

We are encouraged that our state's 15-week abortion limit remains in effect as the Florida Supreme Court considers a challenge to it. The legislature's passage of a bill to further limit abortion to six-weeks of gestation during the 2023 session and its approval by Governor DeSantis is a momentous achievement. This legislation also increases resources to pregnant women and young families through the Florida Pregnancy Care Network almost six-fold. If the 15-week law is upheld, the further limit to six weeks will go into effect thirty days later, ushering in a new era. Much remains to be done to properly recognize the dignity of the child in the womb, but this marks tremendous progress in the legal protection of preborn children in Florida.

This progress, as well as gains made over the past several decades to protect women and their preborn children from the harms of abortion, is at significant risk. An extreme ballot initiative proposing to amend our state constitution to legalize full-term abortion is of grave concern. If ultimately passed, the amendment would legalize abortion up until birth, including when the baby is capable of feeling pain. While the proposed amendment permits parental notification, the amendment would eliminate the current law requiring parental consent for a minor daughter to receive an abortion.

As is required of the petition initiative process, the proposed ballot language is under review by the Florida Supreme Court. In our briefs to the Court, we contend that the ballot title and summary are misleading, which should preclude its placement on the ballot. The title states the amendment "limits" government interference with abortion when the amendment actually prohibits all regulation before viability. Neither does the language provide fair notice of its impact on existing statutory protections for women. If this extreme amendment ultimately appears on the November 2024 ballot, we urge all Floridians to "vote no."

A healthy society can only continue to flourish if based on a consistent recognition of the rights of each individual, especially the weakest and most defenseless. With this in mind, we remain committed to pursuing full legal protection of preborn children and continue to support efforts to offer practical assistance and accompaniment to women and their families experiencing difficulties during pregnancy and beyond. We invite all people of good will to join us in these endeavors.

**Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski**    **Most Rev. Gerald M. Barbarito**    **Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane**    **Most Rev. John G. Noonan** Archdiocese of Miami    Diocese of Palm Beach    Diocese of Venice    Diocese of Orlando

**Most Rev. Gregory L. Parkes**    **Most Rev. William A. Wack, C.S.C.**    **Most Rev. Erik T. Pohlmeier**    **Most Rev. Enrique E. Delgado** Diocese of St. Petersburg    Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee    Diocese of St. Augustine    Archdiocese of Miami