

St. Peter's, Holy Guardian Angels, and St. John the Baptist Parishes

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January 18, 2026

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Mass Readings

The **First Reading** is taken from the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah 49:3, 5-6* and is the second of the "suffering servant" prophecies, found in Isaiah. These were prophecies uttered during the Babylonian exile to encourage the Jewish exiles to persevere in their trust in Yahweh, who would soon liberate them from Babylon, and eventually send them the long-expected Messiah, promised to Abraham.

The **Second Reading** is from the *First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians 1:1-3*. The opening verses of this letter have been chosen for the reading because they show the prophecy, read in the first lesson, as fulfilled among the pagans, as well as emphasizing the purpose of the Messiah's coming: the sanctification and true enlightenment of all nations.

The **Gospel** is from *St. John 1:29-34*. The pages of the Gospel present John the Baptist as a symbolic example of a 'bridegroom's friend', as Christ's excellent and exemplary witness. The Baptist's pre-eminent witness was affirmed in two ways: firstly with regard to the content of his testimony and secondly with respect to its style.

With regard to the content of his testimony, the Baptist identified Jesus as '*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*' (Jn 1:29). Anticipating Jesus' messianic and salvific role, each of the four evangelists start their Gospels with the Baptist's words. The Lamb refers to the idea of salvation. The Lamb is the gift of liberation that, following the flight from Egypt, the Israelites sacrificed to the Lord. The Lamb recalls the servant of the Lord, the messianic image described by the Prophet Isaiah, '*like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb before its shearers*' (Is 53:7). The Lamb recalls the image of the Victorious Lamb in the Book of the Apocalypse who at the end of time will definitively destroy evil and sin. John the Baptist is therefore, an authoritative witness who knew Jesus' exact identity and why He came amongst men.

With regard to John the Baptist's style, St John's Gospel (cfr Jn 3:28-29) presents St John the Baptist through the image of the 'bridegroom's friend'. He gives witness, yet is not positioned central to the events that are unfolding. His testimony is totally centralised on Christ. John indicates the presence of the Lord and then steps into the margins. '*I am not the Christ*' and he goes on to affirm '*I am the one who has been sent to go in front of him. It is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy I feel, and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less.*' (Jn 3:28-30)

Today's Gospel offers us an eloquent example to imitate, so that we can also become Christ's authoritative witnesses. A believer can only give an authoritative witness if it coexists in perfect harmony with two of the Baptist's evangelical qualities. Firstly, knowledge of Christ that is cultivated through prayer, the sacramental and ecclesial life, reading good books and edifying friendships. Secondly, the constant attributes of a 'bridegroom's friend' who goes in search of the Groom through the virtue of humility because always, in everyone's life, Christ must increase and we must decrease!

—From the Dicastery for the Clergy

Schedule of Mass Intentions

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

SJB

4:00 PM

+ For the people

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

SP

9:00 AM

+ George MacDonald

Friday, January 23, 2026

HGA **11:00 AM**
+ Michael “Bernard” Sampson

Saturday, January 24, 2026

SJB **4:00 PM**
+ Annie & Freddie Burke
SP **5:30 PM**
+ Claire LeBlanc

Sunday, January 25, 2026

HGA **11:00 AM**
+ Fr. Grégorie Sampson

Receipts

St. John the Baptist
January 11, 2026

Envelopes & Loose	\$	972.00
Total	\$	<u>972.00</u>

St. Peter’s
January 11, 2026

Envelopes & Loose	\$	895.75
Candles		11.00
Initial Offering		135.00
New Year’s Day		180.00
Total	\$	<u>1,221.75</u>

Holy Guardian Angels
January 11, 2026

Envelopes & Loose	\$	845.00
Candles		26.00
Total	\$	<u>871.00</u>

Community News

Mass for Shut Ins Our three parishes and Sacred Heart, Johnstown, will be responsible for the Mass for Feb. 8. Tapping will take place on **Saturday, January 31** at St. Marguerite Bourgeois Church at 40 Cabot St., Sydney. We need lectors and as many for a congregation that can attend. Thank you to the choir and organist who have agreed to attend. Hopefully, the weather will co-operate.

Von: Richmond Co. Meals on Wheels Program. Frozen meals can be cooked in microwave or conventional oven and may be picked up at our St. Peter’s location (Bonnie Brae Club) or can be delivered at no charge. Cost is \$6.00 per meal and billed on a monthly basis. We are currently seeking volunteer (s) for L’Ardoise/Johnstown route. Mileage reimbursement is provided for drivers. For more information please contact Christi at (902) 345-2900 Ext. 1.

Session on MAiD: Knights of Columbus, St. Peter's Council Port Hood, is hosting a session on **Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) on Sunday January 25, 2026, from 2.00pm to 4.00pm**. The session will be led by **Professor William Sweet**, Director, Centre for Philosophy, Theology, and Cultural Traditions, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish. There will be a presentation and time for questions & answers. Snacks and Tea will be served.

Celebrating Ordinary Time in the Church within Our Extraordinary Time in History: A Reflection by Rev. John Yake, I. V. Dei, Pastor

“We ought always to keep our soul in the condition in which we want it to appear before God. Then we shall not have to be afraid that death will surprise us.”

(From a letter to a Religious of St. Ursula by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, in *The letters of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, pg. 193)

As we set out on a new Liturgical or Church year, Ordinary Time, it is opportune to be reminded of the beauties and uniqueness of our Catholic faith. Specifically, the immensity of Divine Love that God intended to be our joy and heavenly inheritance. We read, “The glory of God is man fully alive; moreover, man's life is the vision of God” (St. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*)

The Advent-Christmas season returned us to the origins of the Christian adventure so that we might be renewed in our baptismal commitment. This annual remembrance is hugely important especially in our time when, as the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen prophesied back in the 1950s, secular culture dominates resulting in religious indifference, religious confusion and relativism of values. In his book, *Fragmented Gods*, sociologist of religion, Reginald Bibby, assigned the term, *Cafeteria Catholics*, to Catholics who feel authorized to pick and choose beliefs that fit their lifestyle but which forgets the love that can make them truly happy. Pope Francis warned that this cultural nihilism (a philosophy that asserts life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value, rejecting established moral and ethical foundations) threatens to rob the world of hope.

The Church teaches that it is the duty of Catholics to know Jesus Christ and the Magisterium, or teaching ministry of the Church, publishes the Catechism, (from the Greek, *catechesi* – to echo) to make the heart and mind of Christ available. (1 Cor. 2: 16) Neglect of scripture and ignorance of the catechism results in Catholics being conditioned by media messages and thus susceptible to accept the beliefs and values of secular, atheistic culture. For example, it has been reported that 70% of Catholics support Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), and abortionist, Henry Morgentaler claimed that half of his clients were Catholics. A global apostasy seems to be upon us; apostasy is the formal abandonment or renunciation of a religious belief, it is a deliberate turning away from established doctrines, a rejection of one's baptism. After the resurrection Jesus called disciples, witnesses, challenging them to conform themselves to him, the light, in opposition to the darkness of worldly values. Failing to do so becomes a scandal, especially to the young who are formed by the example of adults. The Church on earth has been termed, the Church Militant, precisely because it is doing battle against the spiritual forces that oppose Christ's mission. On this point St. Paul wrote, “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6: 12)

Catholics need to be convinced that Jesus still and always leads his Church through the authorities of the Sacred Scriptures, Canon Law, that implements the Word of God in changing times, and personally through the hierarchy: bishops, priests, and deacons. The goal of leadership is to enable unity and harmony in an organization: When governing a nation, teaching in the classroom, coaching a sport, conducting an orchestra, leaders lead participants by their agreement to obey a set of laws. Jesus leads through these three agencies to ensure that the gospel is preached to embolden faith (Romans 10:17) and by the theological reflection of the *magisterium* that addresses contemporary issues to achieve Jesus' goal of the salvation of souls and Church unity as noted in the Messiah's only recorded prayer. (John 17:21)

The holy book of the Bible, from *biblion*, the Greek word for book or scroll, is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1: 20-21) and referred to as the Canon. The word, Canon, is derived from the Hebrew word, *kaneh*, a tall reed used to measure things in the marketplace. It came to mean the standard, measure or rule. A canonized person, for example, now a saint who can be imitated by Christians as the measure of Christ, the measure of the Christian life.

The word, hierarchy, is from the ancient Greek word for ‘priest,’ *hieros*, meaning holy, sacred, or consecrated, someone who performs sacred rites, offers sacrifices, and serves in religious contexts. The Old Testament priests were *hiereus* that refers to the function of offering sacrifice. Being fully divine and fully human Jesus was the perfection of this priesthood and so he

is the last hiereus and the term is not used in the New Testament. The priests of the New Covenant were termed, *presbyteros* (elder), one who leads the people, one who may enter the presence of God, speak directly to him as he does in the Eucharistic Prayer, and offer himself and his existence in sacrifice to God by evoking the Lord's unique sacrifice on the cross as his own.

The Pope is the **visible** head of the Church on earth, but Jesus remains its **invisible** leader who has given the Church his priesthood so he can preside personally at the sacraments through the ordained priesthood that he established at the Last Supper. To communicate that priests are *alter Christos*, 'another Christ,' they wear the sacred vestments that symbolize Christ and at their ordination they receive two powers from him: *ordo eucharisticum*, the power to administer the sacraments, and *ordo jurisdictiones*, authority to govern the Church, so the triple authority to 'teach, govern, and sanctify the People of God.'

The Church's Canon Law, like the regulations of any organization, offers detailed rules on a variety of matters to enable the harmonious practice of the Christian life enabling its redemptive mission to succeed. Catholics are not required to read the whole of the law, but all are expected to grow in the faith and to practice that which is foundational for one to identify as a Catholic. This is also true of a citizen, a student, an athlete, a musician, and those who participate in any endeavour, they do not need to know all the laws but only those that pertain to their activity. For example, to earn a driver's license one need not know all the rules for every vehicle but only the minimum, those that pertain to them. For Catholics the legal minimum is obedience to the Precepts of the Church.

The Seven Precepts of the Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists five precepts. The last two are listed here as they are included elsewhere in the catechism but are not listed as precepts, but they are equally important.

1. To attend mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and resting from servile works.
2. To observe the days of abstinence and fasting.
3. To confess our sins to a priest at least once a year.
4. To receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist at least once a year during Easter season
5. To contribute to the support of the church.
6. To obey the laws of the church concerning matrimony.
7. To participate in the Church's mission of Evangelization of Souls. (Missionary Spirit of the Church.)

Most of the precepts do not require explanation but here to comment on two of them: the Eucharist and Matrimony.

The Eucharist

Key themes in St. Paul's teaching on the Eucharist (from *eucharistein* – to give thanks or to be thankful) emphasized its profound reality as participation in Christ's body and blood, contrasting it with pagan idolatry (1 Cor 10:18-21) and warning against unworthy reception, which he wrote makes one "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Cor 11:27) He highlighted its power to unite believers that demands the greatest reverence because it is Christ himself and its reception as central to Catholic worship. He asked, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16-17). This isn't mere symbolism; it is the actual union with Christ's sacrifice, sharing the one bread unites believers into one body, the Church. St. Paul defended the Eucharist as the real, powerful presence of Christ, central to Christian identity, distinct from idol worship, and a foretaste of eternal communion.

Reception of Holy Communion is not a casual or social happening but a spiritual event where believing disciples of the Lord encounter one another and Jesus who strengthens communicants for the Christian mission. Attendance at a wedding or Funeral Mass is not an invitation to receive the Eucharist but intended by Christ to embolden the Christian life of believers. In the 'olden days,' I believe, attendees at a Funeral Mass were there to pray for the deceased who faces judgement. I suspect that that meaning may no longer be persons' motivation, especially since wakes are not always conducted. The Mass is always and only a celebration of Christ's prayer and obedience to the Father whereas it is the wake that is the celebration of the deceased. It seems that the agenda of the wake has been implicitly transferred into Holy Mass as obituaries wrongly announce a Christian funeral as a celebration of the deceased. Obituaries tell of the various contexts habituated by the deceased: the family, the world of work, and hobbies or

pastimes. Christian obituaries should include the religious context of the deceased because, like the lives of the saints, his or her religious commitment offers readers a witness to faith and certainly contributes to the homilist's preparation for preaching at the funeral.

Only those in the state of grace and in communion with the Catholic Church, accepting its teachings, publicly living as a Catholic, and dedicated to living a life of faith, should receive Holy Communion. Sacrilegious communions are a grave offense, akin to harming Christ's actual body, not just disrespecting the Church's sacrament. Unfortunately, it has become necessary for priests to request that those who do not qualify for the sacrament to refrain from reception. This is regrettable because this part of the Mass, Holy Communion, is intended to be a moment of unity of Christ with his Church, and that sad announcement injects an element of division. However, in our time when so many are unchurched, or if Catholic but no longer practicing, they do not realize that they do great harm to themselves and create scandal by a sacrilegious communion. The priest has a responsibility both to the sacrament and to those who may not realize the significance of receiving the Eucharist. This issue was also present in the early Church's celebration of the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist. We read, "Do not give what is holy to dogs; And do not throw your pearls before swine..." (Matthew 7: 6) to emphasize the need for spiritual discernment and wisdom in sharing sacred truths. It is worth noting that all Christian communions have agreed that there is no inter-communion; Christians receive communion where they have communion of faith. Reception of communion in the Catholic Church is a sacrament for those baptized in the Catholic Church and who are disposed to grow in their love for God.

Imagine what would happen in a country, a classroom, a game of sport, an orchestra, if members disobediently disregarded the leader's directions and exercised the activity according to their whims. Think of the chaos that would follow. I suspect that this is what is happening in the Church today as many Catholics, neglecting the scriptures, ignorant of Canon Law, and disobedient to Church leadership feel authorized to define the Catholic faith for themselves. This attitude and action jeopardize the aim of Christ in gifting the Church with the Eucharist, persons' eternal salvation, and unity in the Church.

St. Carlo Acutis called the Eucharist his *highway to heaven* and based on this understanding he observed three evils in the life of Catholics that go unnoticed but risks their eternal condemnation. St. Carlo asserted that the Eucharist is the only power that offers freedom from these evils, and this was Christ's purpose by giving himself to us in the Eucharist and telling us to do this in his memory. St. Carlo viewed faith as fire that must be fed or it will go out. He was referring to Catholics who become lukewarm or indifferent and so are not alive spiritually. Some of these Catholics practice their faith, they are exteriorly good, but they cling to a hidden sin that has become normalized because it is rationalized or justified as culturally acceptable; "Everyone is doing it." It might be a lack of charity in thought, word, or deed, subtle pride, gossiping, vulgar language, sexual impurity, off-colour jokes, dishonesty in business, etc. all rationalized so that one's conscience is eventually silenced, and no guilt is felt and needed conversion impossible. Sin becomes routine and sacramental confession is deemed unnecessary, but these Catholics continue to receive Holy Communion. Although made for God's love they refuse divine mercy but disbelief in or denial of punishment due to sin and indifference is not a defense against eventual divine justice.

The Eucharist, according to St. Carlo, is the sacrament that can overcome these two evils. He observed that many Catholics have lost reverence for and the obligatory nature of the Eucharist, many do not believe in the real presence of Christ, and the Eucharist becomes just one option in their active lives that can be easily omitted for more sleep or some other activity. In effect, they say, "I would rather spend time with you than with Jesus." When Catholics stop feeding on Jesus, they have lost the truth that the Eucharist sustains their faith and they're trying to live the Christian life on their own without the aid of divine grace. St. Carlo saw these three traps working together: Lukewarm religious indifference, leading to habitual sin, and eventually staying away from Holy Mass. Yet, he observed, these persons still call themselves Catholics, perhaps believing that a Catholic funeral will magically save them, but put no effort into being spiritual, into growing closer to God, because they have other priorities.

Marriage

As the head of the Church Jesus Christ has given it its sacramental essence; as we learned from the catechism: "outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace." The sacraments are designed by Christ to have us co-operate with and contribute to the divine plan of the salvation of souls. There are three categories of sacraments that aim to embolden the Christian life: three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation, two sacraments of healing: the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and

two sacraments of vocation: Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* discusses each sacrament at length but here to note only some Canon Law concerning sacramental marriage.

When the decision to marry is made Catholics, as subjects of the Church, are obliged to marry according to the form prescribed by the Catholic Church and that is before a Catholic minister: bishop, priest, or deacon and two witnesses. We read, in part, from canon 1108, "Only those marriages are valid which are contracted in the presence of the local Ordinary or parish priest or of the priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who, in the presence of two witnesses" Catholic ministers and those of other Christian communions, religions and civil authorities have a civic licence from the Government so that the marriages that they perform are legal and can be registered in a civic registry, but only the Catholic form is a sacrament in the Catholic Church. In some jurisdictions in Europe everyone is married by a civic jurisdiction and then Catholics go to their church to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony. Failing to marry in the Catholic Church according to its norms means that one is no longer in communion with the Catholic Church and is therefore excluded from reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Not much more can be said about this sacrament here because each couple's situation is different. The paragraph above offers the very general law that applies to all Catholics. When the decision to marry is made the couple needs to contact their pastor for an interview so that he can ascertain their freedom to consent to marriage, and whether their situation follows Church law or requires any dispensations from the bishop. This meeting is obligatory because "If consent is lacking there is no marriage." (Canon 2201)

Ordinary Time in the Church is an opportunity to grow in holiness by taking advantage of the guidance and graces that Jesus Christ has won for us by his Paschal Mystery. His only desire is our eternal salvation, and this must also be our motivation as we try to live better the Christian life. When St. Aloysius Gonzaga was asked what he would do if he had only one hour to live, he replied, "I would play soccer," indicating his readiness to meet Christ, who, as we profess in the Creed, is the judge of our immortal souls. Christmas joy is intended to go with us throughout Ordinary Time because we always live in what Pope Francis entitled in a pastoral letter, the *Joy of the Gospel*.