

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

Once upon a time, a fellow finds himself in front of the Pearly Gates at the entrance to Heaven. St. Peter, the porter of the gates, explains that it's not easy to enter into Heaven. "There are some criteria's that must be meet before entry is allowed. For example, were you a church goer or religious?" "No", responded the man. St. Peter told him, "That's bad. Were you generous, giving money to the poor or to charities?" "No," he responded again. This too was bad, said St. Peter. St. Peter then asked him if he did any good deeds, such as helping his neighbor. Anything? Again he said "NO."

St. Peter was becoming concerned. Exasperated, St. Peter says, "Look, everyone does something kind sometime. Work with me, here! I'm trying to help. Now think!" The man thinks for a minute, then says, "Well, I did help this old lady once. I came out of a store and saw that a dozen members of a motorcycle gang had taken her purse and were shoving her around. I threw my bags down and got her purse back, then I told the biggest biker there that he was cowardly and I spat in his face." "WOW," said St. Peter, "That's impressive! When did this happen?" The man looked at his watch and replied, "Oh, about 15 minutes ago."

In *Sister Wendy's Book of Saints*, art historian Sister Wendy Beckett writes about us: "Holiness can so easily appear as something remote from us, to be read about or . . . gazed at, but from afar. Yet to be a saint is a wholly practical and realistic growth into our own truth. It is what we are all meant to become, it is our deepest fulfillment, our own personal realization of what we have been potentially from birth. There is no play about sanctity. *It starts from where we are and what we are.*"

You and I are living between our baptism and our Funeral Mass. Today's Feast of All Saints reminds us of those men, women, young adults and children who have won the crown of eternal life and enjoy seeing and being with God face to face. Today's Feast of All Saints challenges us to move deeper into the saint we were born to be.

In the song, "Abba, Father," we acknowledge that He is the potter and that we are the clay, the work of His hands. We pray that God molds us and fashions us into the very image of Jesus Christ, His Son.

This is the in-between time, the present moment, when the Divine Potter – God – melts us, molds us, shapes us and uses us for His divine purpose, as a potter shapes clay. The potter has a definite design in mind. "What shall I make of this lump of clay?" the Potter asks.

If we are pliable, if we allow ourselves to be shaped by God, we become the precious work of art He wants us to be. If we are stubborn, hardened or uncooperative, the Potter smashes us on the wheel and starts all over. When life smashes us, God's poor but beloved clay, we look to the Potter to help make things right.

St. John reminds us in our Second Reading today that even though we have feet and hearts of clay, we too are sons and daughters of God, His children. NOW! RIGHT NOW!!! So we can call God, "Abba," "Daddy," as well as the Master Potter. We are clay, the work of God's hands.

The Beatitudes which we heard proclaimed in today's Gospel, shows us the method, the "how" of being molded and shaped into God's image and likeness. Realizing our need for God. Being sad with those who are sad. Controlling our ego and pride. Showing mercy. Having only one purpose in life: to know God, to love God, and to serve God. To strive, to celebrate and to serve, as we say in our parish mission statement.

Today's celebration of All Saints is an emphatic reminder that our faith heroes are the people we now honor as saints. Our First Reading from Revelation makes two attempts to give us the number of our "holy heroes." John tells us he "heard the number of those who had been marked by the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand." This is not a literal number. This multiple of a decade, a dozen and a thousand are numbers signifying completeness and is meant to be all-inclusive. With my luck, my ticket stub would be #140,008!

Even if it was to be taken literally, the Roman Catholic Church has officially acknowledged only twelve thousand of them. We still have a way to go!

Then, to make sure that nobody is left out of the count, John writes that he has a "vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue." We cannot possibly know all of them. But it is possible and important that we get to know some of them, even those who lived among us and with us in our time and in our place. Like Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and the soon-to-be Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey. Who knows, the list might even include you and me one day!

[Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

It is a teaching of our Catholic faith that every Mass we offer is for everyone: We honor the Church Triumphant by recalling the names of the angels and saints in Heaven. We remember the Church Militant, which is you and me, and everyone on this planet who is struggling, surviving and celebrating the fact that we can work with Jesus Christ in achieving our salvation. He died for us and for all, but in the new English, more literal and faithful translation of the Roman Missal, Jesus sheds His Blood in the Chalice. He says, "The Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." What does that mean?

It means that some of us on this planet choose not to work with Jesus for the salvation of the world. It means that if one freely chooses to reject Jesus Christ, his eternal salvation is at risk. Some say that the "unforgivable sin" that St. Paul speaks of is the utter despair that Jesus Christ cannot forgive all of our sins, even the most despicable ones in the deepest recesses of our heart. We think the power of our sins is stronger than God's power to forgive and heal.

The folks we pray for today are those who in their heart of hearts truly wanted to be faithful followers of Jesus, who have departed from this life in the grace and favor of God, but who are still in Purgatory, the Church Suffering, waiting for entrance into Heaven. They will eventually make it to Heaven, but still need some purification.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the New Jerusalem, which is Heaven. It describes Heaven in all of its glory, but with the warning that "nothing unclean will enter it." (Rev. 21:27) Entrance into Heaven requires purity of the soul, as we heard yesterday: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God." (Mt. 5:8) It is sin that stains the heart, which is why we try to avoid sin and why we go to confession if we fall into sin. But sin also has a ripple effect. While confession cleanses the heart and the soul, the damage caused by sin has already been done. We have to try and make amends for that damage. That's where penance comes in, but it also explains the reason for Purgatory.

Let's say that I break someone's window (sin). I tell that person that I'm sorry (confession) and he forgives me (absolution). That's great, but there's still a hole in the window that needs to be repaired and paid for (satisfaction). Penance is our way of paying off the debt, but if we die not having finished repairing the damage, there needs to be a way that we can continue doing so before we are able to enter Heaven. This is what takes place in Purgatory. In Purgatory, a soul is purified and prepared so that it is ready for entrance into Heaven. This is where All Souls' Day and praying for those who have died come in.

We are the Church Militant, the souls still fighting the good fight here on Earth. We pray with the Church Triumphant (the angels and saints in Heaven) to help us get through this life. We pray for the Church Suffering (the Souls in Purgatory) so that their entrance into Heaven may be swift. We do penances for them to help them fulfill their time in Purgatory. And we offer Masses for them because nothing is more valuable, no prayer more powerful than the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If they are already with God, our prayers deepen their intimacy with God, and our prayers make their prayers for us more powerful.

The Feast of All Saints, celebrated yesterday, and the Feast of All Souls, which we celebrate today, teach us that the Church is not just here on Earth. It is also in Heaven and in Purgatory. We who are here on Earth are still united through baptism to those who have gone before us. And that gives us great comfort. Catholics don't just "remember" the dead; *we remain united with them*.

Soon, we will hear the names of those who have died over the past 12 months in our community. A rose will show our love for them.

One of the best ways to commemorate All Souls' Day is to visit a cemetery. If it is done as a family activity, it can be a great way to teach children how we respect the dead. There is also the great tradition of offering Masses for those who have died. And to say throughout the day: Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!

[Readings: Mal. 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10; Psalm 131; 1 Thess. 2:7b-9, 13; Matt 23-1-12]

As I reflect especially upon our First Reading and Gospel passage this morning, I see in my mind's eye the great Judgment Day. Millions of people are gathered all in one spot – the ancient City of Megiddo, if we believe the movie, *The Omen*. God comes down from the Heavens on His great Throne, with the Son of God on His right hand, and the Holy Spirit on His left.

His thunderous voice bellows: “All of you, my clergy, gather around at the front of the multitude!” Ever obedient, all the bishops, priests and deacons come to the head of the class. Looking down their noses at the lowly laity, and raising their noses in the air of superiority, they see God the Father gathering up the thunderbolts in His outstretched hands.

Looking back at the crowds and at each other, the clergy say to one another: “They’re gonna get it now!” They snicker as they await Round One of Judgment Day. They look back up at God. Their eyes grow wide as they see God releasing His anger and wrath – at THEM! The thunderbolts burn most of them to a crisp. Not the ending you were expecting, eh?

All of you lay folks – men, women, youth and children who make up what we call the laity – all of you will receive your just desserts at the end of time, for how you lived your lives on earth – good or bad. But we ordained folks are going to have a lot more to answer for. One visionary said a hundred years ago that the road to Hell will be paved with the heads of all the bad priests in the world who ever lived. YIKES! They did not practice what they preached! Maybe that’s why I have never been a fan of brick pavers with my name on it!

That’s how serious – how deadly serious – we bishops, priests and deacons are to take our call to ordained ministry and our service to God through our ministry and service to you. As you have heard at so many non-Catholic wedding ceremonies, marriage is not something to be entered into lightly. Neither is the call to priesthood or to the permanent diaconate. It comes with a price. But the retirement benefits are “out of this world!” And worth the calling!

Today's reading from both Malachi and Jesus call us ordained men to a renewal of priestly integrity. A renewal of the gift of one's very self, working day and night, as health permits! The truly good bishop, priest or deacon sees their lifestyle as that of a gentle, nursing mother – protecting and nurturing the spiritual children God gives them.

That is the best compliment I have been given as a priest: that something inspired by the Holy Spirit that I said or did brought someone closer to God, closer to their faith, closer to the Church. I read many of those kinds of testimonials you write in your cards and notes to me for Priesthood Sunday and my birthday. It is that positive affirmation that you give me which sustains me in darker days.

The worthiness of being a priest, the worthiness of being a son or daughter of God, is something we never earn. It is given to us freely, generously and lovingly by God, through the constant interaction of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul says in today's Second Reading, "is now at work in you who believe."

Today's Gospel reading contains a verse that, when taken literally, has been used by some Protestants to condemn Catholicism because we call our priests "Father." By that logic, when Jesus said, "Call no one on earth your father," he meant our dads, too, right? Did he never call St. Joseph by the title father? Perhaps when Jesus as a lad had a question about carpentry he said, "Hey dude who's married to Mom!" I don't think so. To understand what Jesus means in this scripture, we need to read the whole passage: This singled-out verse is actually part of a teaching about equality. He is telling us that we must not consider anyone to be superior to ourselves -- no one but God is superior to us. Remember then that in all of this, the emphasis is NOT on our unworthiness. None of us is truly worthy. Beginning with me. Rather, it is on our faith in Jesus Christ! God's grace given in the sacrament of the Eucharist is a gift. We only need to respond to and accept this gift, and live it. Blessed indeed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb! And to live that holiness in our daily lives. AMEN!

On November 18, 2017, here in Detroit, Blessed Solanus Casey became the second U.S.-born priest to be beatified, joining Oklahoma City priest Father Stanley Rother, who was beatified just this September. Fr. Rother was born in Oklahoma and served and was killed in Guatemala. Among the personal effects belonging to Blessed Stanley at the time of his 1981 martyrdom were several relics. It's notable that one of those few relics in his possession was a third-class relic of Father Solanus, a Capuchin friar and miracle worker who gained widespread notoriety for his holiness.

The cause of canonization informally began for Blessed Solanus in 1960, when the Father Solanus Guild was established to preserve his memory. Favors began being reported to Rome in the mid-1960s. A canonization cause was initiated via the Archdiocese of Detroit in 1976, and in 1995 it was declared Father Solanus lived a life of heroic virtue, earning him the distinction as the first U.S.-born male to be given the title "venerable." A miracle attributed to his intercession was validated in 1998, only to be proven false subsequently. On May 4, 2017, Pope Francis approved the miracle attributed to his intercession that cleared the path for his beatification at Ford Field. 153 of our parishioners and friends attended, and our own Deacon Marion Jurewicz spoke one of the petitions for the Universal Prayer of the Faithful in Polish. My sister Kathy and I watched the beautiful Mass at home, neither of us physically up to travel.

Born Bernard Francis Casey in Wisconsin to Irish immigrant parents on Nov. 25, 1870, he spent his early years gaining a reputation as diligent and hard working. But not unlike many of the saints, Blessed Solanus struggled in identifying his vocation. Time and again it seemed he had found where God wanted him, only to find out otherwise.

As a young adult he tried his hand at a variety of jobs -- from operating a street car to serving as a prison guard. Always personable and charming, Blessed Solanus did not find it too difficult to fit in and develop relationships with those around him.

But Blessed Solanus was left wanting more than just a job. In his young adult years, he thought marriage was in his future -- having proposed to a young woman only to have her disapproving mother send her off to a boarding school. A very sensitive man by nature, this experience wounded him deeply. But experiences such as this led him to learn how to unite his sensitivity and the many hurts in his life with the sufferings of Christ.

As is the case with divine providence, when God closes one door he opens another -- an even better one. And so he did for Blessed Solanus. This would be shown time and again throughout his life because of the many challenges posed to him regarding his vocation. The unfolding story of his vocation taught him much about the dependence on God's will and providence; what he learned is the path to his heart's contentment and peace.

After witnessing a brutal murder of a woman while on duty as a street-car operator in 1891, Blessed Solanus first felt the call to the priesthood. He felt the urge to do something concrete to bring about change in a broken world and make a difference in the lives of others. After praying and reflecting for a few days, Blessed Solanus visited his parish priest and asked how to go about entering the seminary.

He was destined for more hurt and disappointment during his time at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. Having gone out in search of work as a young man to help his financially struggling family, Blessed Solanus had not completed any schooling higher than eighth grade, and this made his seminary studies difficult. Classes were conducted in German and Latin, and Blessed Solanus struggled academically, particularly with languages.

Although the seminary officials in Milwaukee dismissed him because of his poor grades, they were of the opinion that the religious life might be a good fit for him. He visited the Capuchin Franciscans nearby, but felt no attraction to their life -- especially their use of German or their wearing of the cumbersome beards he disliked. Not sure of what to do next, he went home in 1896.

Under the tutelage and counsel of a Capuchin in Wisconsin, however, the young Casey decided to give the Capuchins a closer look, although he still was

reticent and unenthused. The friar who counseled him even said the beard would help his throat, where he suffered chronic illness. After a lengthy correspondence, Blessed Solanus was accepted into the order.

Throughout his life, Blessed Solanus was especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, so he decided to place his future in her hands. After completing a novena in commemoration of her Immaculate Conception, Blessed Solanus received a mystical experience that relayed to him an important message: "Go to Detroit."

Detroit was home to the novitiate for the Capuchin province of St. Joseph. Nothing else could explain the urgency, then, of his desire to head for Detroit except for the peace and serenity he found. After receiving his bishop's blessing, he chose to forego a Christmas at home with his family and made his way to Detroit with haste, arriving there on Christmas Eve.

Despite further doubts and fears, Blessed Solanus turned to the Blessed Mother for assistance and felt a sense of peace about the next step. In January, he entered the Capuchins, and with the Franciscan habit, he received a new name, Francis Solanus, after the 17th-century Franciscan missionary to South America who also loved to play the violin.

He entered the Franciscan order novitiate on January 14, 1897 and was ordained a priest on July 24, 1904. He was assigned to parishes in Yonkers, Manhattan and Harlem in New York. He was first sent to Detroit to St. Bonaventure Monastery in 1924, and served until 1945. While he was here, he established the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and a guild to make priests' vestments.

He went back to Brooklyn for two years, and as his health grew dim, he "semi-retired" to the St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana from 1946 to 1956. Like yesterday, hundreds of buses came from Metropolitan Detroit to Indiana to seek Fr. Solanus' blessings and spiritual advice.

He came to Detroit a third time for medical treatment and died on July 31, 1957 at 11:00 AM, fifty-one years to the date and hour of his First Mass.

Jesus is talking to us in a parable today. He tells a story to make a point, to teach us something. A wealthy man is preparing for a long journey. He calls

his three servants and divides his money between them, each according to their ability. To one servant he gave five talents, meaning a sum of money equal to one year's salary, to a second two, and to a third one. Why is life like that? We are all equal in the eyes of God, right? We are all guaranteed equal rights under the Constitution.

But when it comes to our abilities, God simply did not make us all the same. There are some people who can handle five talents; there are some who can handle only one or two. There are some persons who are really smart and some who are smart in other ways.

There are some who are musical or artistic, or handy in the repair shop, the kitchen or spiritually, like Fr. Solanus, and there are some who are not. There are some who have physical athletic ability and attractive looks, and there are some who do not.

The important thing to remember is that each servant, like Blessed Solanus, is given something. No one is rejected or forgotten. You may not be a five-talent person, but you have some talent. I think that there are a whole lot more one- and two- talent people in this world than there are five-talent people.

A mother was afraid when her little girl said that there were tryouts for the kindergarten play. She knew her daughter couldn't remember lines or sing well, or pretend to be something she wasn't.

Imagine Mom's surprise when her little girl came home from school shouting and skipping with a big smile on her face. Mom asks, "What is YOUR talent, honey, in the play?" The little girl jumped up and down and said, "Teacher said that at the end of the play, I get to jump up and down and clap and cheer!"

All of us Catholic believes are called to be "church cheerleaders!"

What are we doing with our talents?

In our First Reading we hear about the blessing of worthy wife and mother. These words are the words of a mother to her adult son. She cautions him about the pitfalls of strong drink, and about wasting his time and strength with the wrong women who are not good enough for my little Boy-shick!

She then waxes eloquently about a good woman. These words we

hear today are, in the Orthodox Jewish religion to be said by a husband every week at Sabbath prayer, and are sung on the day of her funeral. We also need to hear a lot more, though, about a worthy husband and father. They are getting to be fewer and fewer in our world, as I spoke about back on Father's Day.

What talent does it take to be a good parent or a good spouse? We can boil it down to three things: Faith, hope and love. Not like the wicked, lazy and useless servant condemned in today's Gospel.

A life without God is a life without sunshine, without true meaning. We will look for that meaning in all the wrong places and never find it. St. Augustine once said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Secondly, the good parent, the good spouse is a person of hope. St. Paul writes in today's Second Reading that we should not be unaware that the Lord is coming. In this letter, he thinks Jesus is coming back soon. In time, he will learn to think in God's time, not in our time. The person of hope learns about the Catholic faith and passes it on to their spouse and children.

Finally, a good spouse and parent is a person of love. Do you know that there are some people who light up a room just by walking into it? Unfortunately, there are also people who light up a room after leaving it! Glowing with the love of Jesus means that people can turn to us in their need. They can become friends with us. They can trust us and we can trust them.

Our best friends help get us to Heaven, and we help them get to Heaven. Faith, hope and love are three talents God gives all of us. We just need to tap into them and use them, with the help of our friends on earth, and our oldest and newest friends in Heaven. Blessed Solanus Casey, pray for us! AMEN!

[Readings: Sirach 50:22-24, Psalm 138, 1 Cor. 1:3-9, Luke 17:11-19]

Most of us were toddlers when we learned to say “please” and “thank you.” We were a little older when we fell into the habit of asking, begging, nagging, whining, “Please, please, please, please, ple-e-e-e-e-ease!”

Older still when we began to try bargaining. If you give me this ...” “If you let me do that ...” Then, “I’ll never ask for anything else again.” (Yeah, sure.) “I’ll do my homework right after ...” (Insert laugh here.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, our relationship with God tended to follow the same track. Almost always ready, willing and able to ask politely. More than a little slow with the thank-you note. If we even remembered to write it and mail it. Or email it. Or text it. If we even remembered to say it with more than a passing “thank you” in the same tone and sincerity we may have used in years gone by when our mother would pointedly ask, “What do you say?”

So how do we — how can we — sincerely say “thanks” to our Heavenly Father? Well, thankfully our Creator has given us a lot of ways to do just that. Journalist Bob Dodds from Our Sunday Visitor suggests are seven of them. See which ones you can do.

1. **GO TO MASS.** NO DOUBT YOU KNOW THE WORD “EUCCHARIST” IS FROM THE GREEK FOR “THANKSGIVING” OR “GRATITUDE.” BUT, OF COURSE, UPPERCASE-“E” EUCCHARIST REFERS TO MASS AND THE BLESSED SACRAMENT. WHEN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ASKS “WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?” ITS FIRST ANSWER IS “EUCCHARIST, BECAUSE IT IS AN ACTION OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD.” GREAT! GO TO MASS. A DONE DEAL. NEXT.

It’s an action of thanksgiving, which certainly implies us doing something there besides stand, sit, kneel, walk up for Communion, stay for a closing hymn and head out the door. Without our actively taking part in the Mass — praying with others, offering our own private prayers, reverently receiving the Blessed Sacrament, joining in the singing — then we’re pretty much like that child blurting a fast and nearly thoughtless “thank you” to appease Mom.

2. DO WHAT JESUS TOLD US TO DO. UH OH. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US? YES, HE SAID TAKE PART IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD IN MEMORY OF HIM (Lk 22:19), BUT HE ALSO MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT “LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU” (Jn 13:34). WHAT BETTER WAY TO SHOW GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT OF FAITH THAN TO LIVE THE FAITH? HOW DO WE LIVE IT? LOVE AS JESUS LOVED. AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? FIND OUT BY SPENDING SOME TIME THIS YEAR — EACH MONTH, EACH WEEK, EACH DAY — READING ABOUT HOW HE DID IT. SPEND TIME “PRAYING” THE GOSPELS.

Then, too, living the Faith — living our gratitude to God — means living the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Sometimes that can be particularly challenging, but other times it’s pretty simple. Small choices throughout the day can develop over time into virtuous habits that make us more inclined and better prepared to tackle those challenging opportunities.

3. DON’T PUT A GIFT FROM GOD IN YOUR SOCK DRAWER. WHAT? SOMETIMES WE RECEIVE A GIFT FROM A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND AND QUIETLY TUCK IT AWAY IN A DRESSER DRAWER. IT’S NOT SOMETHING WE NEED, WANT, KNOW HOW TO USE OR EVEN LIKE. WHEN WE DO THAT WITH A GIFT FROM GOD IT RUNS COUNTER TO WHAT JESUS TAUGHT IN THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Mt 25:14-30). THE LESSON? USE WHAT GOD GIVES YOU. PAY ATTENTION TO THE TALENTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU, DEVELOP THEM, AND USE THEM TO HELP OTHERS.

4. SAY ‘THANK YOU’ TO OTHERS ... AND MEAN IT. CONSIDER THIS: IN DESCRIBING THE LAST JUDGMENT, JESUS SAID, “WHAT YOU DID NOT DO FOR ONE OF THESE LEAST ONES, YOU DID NOT DO FOR ME” (Mt 25:45). SO PART OF WHAT YOU CAN EASILY DO FOR OTHERS THROUGHOUT THIS NEW YEAR, WHICH IS THIS GIFT FROM GOD, IS THANK THEM. “THANK YOU” TO THE STORE CLERK. YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER. THE SUNDAY HOMILIST. AND ON AND ON.

5. WRITE IT DOWN. THIS MAKES A GREAT NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION. ONE THAT’S EASY TO KEEP TRACK OF. AND HARD TO CHEAT ON.

Even those who hold little stock in religion or spirituality have discovered keeping a daily journal or log of people, events and things for which they’re grateful helps them mentally and physically.

You — lucky you, thank God — have that added layer or, more accurately, that foundation of Catholicism. Jotting down a few things at the end of every day can be a prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Because you know the source of all goodness, blessings, grace and love.

6. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. NOT TAKING YOUR HEALTH FOR GRANTED IS A KEY WAY OF THANKING GOD FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT THAT IS GOOD HEALTH. SOMETIMES THAT'S RELATIVELY SIMPLE. PAYING A BIT MORE ATTENTION TO INCLUDING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN YOUR DIET. FLOSSING. CUTTING BACK ON SCREEN TIME TO GET MORE SACK TIME.

But sometimes taking care of yourself can take a lot of effort, such as getting into a program that helps a person overcome an addiction. Going to a mental health professional to learn how to better handle past or current issues that can be physically, mentally or emotionally crippling is also a good step.

Taking care of yourself also means going to confession. Sometimes that's simple; sometimes so very, very difficult. Turning to God in that way is a form of self-care that can be easily overlooked but it's one that has, well, eternal consequences. What a great way to thank God for your immortal soul.

7. Avoid ingratitude Try to be thankful and not fall into the habit of feeling like "I deserve this." Thank God that God doesn't give us what we deserve!

And, if I may add, a P.S. Thank God for the bad times as well as the good times. There's no way bad can be good, right? Except ... if "God writes straight with crooked lines," perhaps there's something he can do, something he is doing, with and through what you're suffering today. This isn't to say any of us love the hard and horrible times. Jesus didn't. Just as we do, he wanted out of his. "He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will'" (Mt 26:39).

Yes, he knew what would come from it — our redemption — but that didn't take away the pain of his passion and death.

So what's that other facet of your particular cross?

Your suffering can be a form of prayer, a uniting of yourself more closely to Christ crucified. It can be a gift of deep, beefy prayers for others. One you

don't want but one that is far from useless. One that even if you're sick, elderly, disabled or frail proves you're far from "useless," no matter what others may think. No matter what you may sometimes feel.

There are lessons and truths, there are depths of spirituality that can only be learned by going through, by living with, hard times. There can be unmatched prayers. There can be many astounding graces.

But ...

All that being said, sometimes it can help — tongue-in-cheek — to acknowledge "God never gives us more than we can handle ... but sometimes he seems to overestimate." As Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey often said, "Thank God ahead of time. Blessed be the Good God in all His designs!" AMEN!