

Mark your calendar

CATHOLIC Youth
SUMMIT
"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."
DIOCESE of ROCKFORD
Oct. 26 Boylan Central Catholic
High School, Rockford

YO
YOUNG OBSERVER



(Photo provided)

VOCATION CORNER

Earn your halo

One of my very favorite works of art is the "Navicella" by the 14th century painter Giotto. This image depicts St. Peter after walking out of the boat towards Christ ... and subsequently falling into the water when he took his gaze off of Christ because he was preoccupied with the wind and the waves around him.

This image is beautiful for many reasons. First, it allows us to remember that Peter truly was able to walk out on the water and to do what was seemingly impossible so long as his focus was on Christ.

Second, the image depicts the exact moment when Peter cried out, "Lord save me!" Giotto shows us what happens the moment that we cry out to God for help. He arrives, has mercy on us, and saves us from our mistakes and weaknesses.

Finally (my favorite part!) if we look closely at the other disciples in the boat we will see that they each have halos above their heads, indicating that these men became saints. If we look above Peter's head we see no such halo.

Does this mean that Giotto had something against Peter and was protesting his sainthood? *Absolutely not!* In this image Peter represents all of us who have not yet won our halos but who are nonetheless called to win our halos and to achieve sanctity by listening to Christ and following where He calls.

So let's go out there and win our halos!

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations
Write to him at kromke@rockforddiocese.org.

Serving for God

Ohio teen with Down syndrome on journey to serve at Mass in 50 states

By LENORA SUMSKY | Catholic News Service

Kara Jackson, a 16-year-old altar server from Holy Family Parish in Middletown, Ohio, is on a quest to serve at Mass in all 50 states.

So far she has served in 18.

Kara's faith journey started in 2013. She has traveled with her family to serve at Masses in states as far west as Nevada, as far south as Georgia and as far east as Maine.

Some people might say that beyond her engaging blue eyes, silky blonde hair and easy, joy-filled smile, God gave Kara something extra that makes her and her venture both extraordinary and heartwarming.

"Kara is special," said Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "(She was) born with Down syndrome and with a special love for God and all people."

Kara has served at Mass with Archbishop Kurtz and Father Michael Tobin at the Church of the Annunciation in Shelbyville, Kentucky, midway between Louisville and Lexington. Kentucky was the sixth state in her journey.

Archbishop Kurtz, whose late brother George had Down syndrome, described Kara as "clearly an expert server" in a blog last September. "Kara's beautiful personality and unique gifts reinforced our church's teachings about the dignity of every human being," he said.

Other people witnessing Kara's devotion have written words of gratitude, love and respect in a journal she keeps to record her travels and the people she meets. Priests and parishioners describe her as "having different abilities" or as being a "true example of God's love among us."

Rick Jackson helps his daughter Kara light an altar candle before Mass at Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, Connecticut, July 29. Kara, an altar server at Holy Family Parish in Middletown, Ohio, is on a lifelong pilgrimage to serve Mass in all 50 states.

"When you serve at Mass, you feel you are closer to God," said Kara, who was 9 years old when she completed training to be an altar server.

She believes God told her to embark on the endeavor. Her mother, Christina Jackson, admitted being a bit skeptical when Kara told her parents what she wanted to do.

"I took her to talk with our parish priests about the idea," Christina said.

Msgr. Paul Metzger, who had known Kara for

most of her life, encouraged her. He told her that it was a good idea and that it could be done. His support was not surprising. The late Msgr. Metzger, who was a priest for 70 years, had celebrated Masses in all 50 states.

Her first state was Indiana, and her most recent, Connecticut. In Rhode Island, she served at the church where President John and Jacqueline

Kennedy were married.

Wherever she has been Kara has been encouraged and supported by priests, deacons and parishioners.

Kara has 32 states to go on her journey. She's back in school now but will continue during long weekends and school vacations.



(CNS photo/Bob Mullen)

Helping

IN AURORA

10th annual Crayons for Kids drive helps area children

For the 10th time, students from Rosary High School, Marmion Academy and Aurora Central Catholic High School have joined forces in the Crayons for Kids school supply drive. This year they collected 30,433 packages of supplies. More than 175 volunteers — including students, parents, faculty, staff and alumni, set up collection sites at 12 area Jewel-Osco stores over two weekends in July and August.



(Photo provided)

Students from Marmion Academy and Rosary High School collect school supplies at Jewel-Osco in Batavia.

communities in four counties. The Crayons for Kids project was started by Brian Zimmerman (Marmion '07) and is continued by his sister, Rosary Junior Monica Zimmerman, along with their parents, Steve and Julie of Batavia.

St. Catherine of Siena teens complete mission trip

The Youth Mission Team from St. Catherine of Siena Parish in West Dundee spent June 8-13 in Toledo, Ohio, volunteering their services to help those in need through the Catholic Heart Work Camp program.

Among their many projects were sprucing up homes; the Catholic Club, a child education center; and a homeless shelter. They also helped at an inner city church that converted its property into a small farm.

Mission team members were Ryan Alvaro, Victoria Antonelli, Madelyn Barrett, Caroline Bayer, Alec Bucholz, Michael Chammany, Erica Costello, John Gotheridge, Trent Hanselmann, Nadine Hernandez, Catherine Hicks, Caroline Hutton, Lisa Jaskowiak, Christine Johnsen, Aidan Johnson, Justin Kaufmann, Stephanie Kaufmann, Gabriel Mendez, Christopher Mueller, Connor Nolan, Kelsea Nolan, Ewa Oszajec, Kasia Oszajec, Christopher Pottorff, Candice Rago, Kelsey Rago, Sam Reedy, Zachary Reedy, Austin Scarnegie, DeMarco Scarnegie, Alex Semler, Kimmy Skavarla, Nathan Smith, Emily Stypinski, Evan Swanson, Casey Weeks, Brandon Wirkus, and Kate Wirkus. Chaperones were Caryn Antonelli, Mark Fitzgerald, Kimberly Grant, Mark Hicks, Peter Mueller, Meaghan Pottorff, Dianne Rago, Katy Swanson, Christopher Reedy, Joe Sakowski, and Jim Scarnegie.



(Photo provided)

Students and chaperones from St. Catherine of Siena Parish in West Dundee

YO FATHER

Q Some of my friends are taking a comparative religion course and have started to attend services at different places. I'm not in the class, but they've asked me to come along. I'm not sure whether I should do that. Is it OK for me to go with them?

A I'm glad that you asked, in particular because it shows that you are seeking a deeper understanding of your own faith at the same time as you begin to open up your eyes to understanding the beliefs of other religions.

This is the first and most important thing that I want to stress before I actually answer your question!

You see, it is crucial that we make sure that we are deeply rooted with a firm foundation in our own faith before we go out to learn about other religions. I would say that before you would go with your friends to learn about other religions that you would first take the time and effort to seek answers to any questions that you might have about your own faith. If you don't do this, then you might risk falling away from your faith by getting swept away by the beauty of rituals or the persuasiveness that is present in most religions (after all, if there weren't elements of truth in them, and if there wasn't any level of appeal, then these religions would cease to exist.)

That being said, I would certainly say that it can be a good thing to learn about and to come to understand different religions. This of course can help us to see where others are coming from and help us to be respectful of their beliefs.

At the same time however, if you would attend one of these services, it would be important to do this in addition to going to Mass on Sunday. The reason why I say this is because we are called to love, serve, and worship God on Sunday and, of course, the way that we do this is through the Mass. Participating in a different service other than our liturgy would leave this obligation unfulfilled.

At this point you may be thinking, "Well Father, what if I am not sure what I believe and want to do this so that I can see where I feel that I belong?" And to that I would say, this is a very legitimate question. How is it that we can be confident in our choice to worship Christ at Mass when there are other options out there?

Or others may say, "How can you be sure or even bold enough to say that your way of worship is the right way or the best way? That seems pretty bold." Well, the bottom line is that the relativistic idea that one religion is best for one person, but if another seems to fit better for someone else then that is ok, is, in fact, a problematic idea.

The truth is that if God created the world, us, and all that is in it, and if He sent His Son to save us from our sins, then this is something that we all must respond to, and this is what we do at Mass. We can't settle for any different religion that strays away from God's story of love for humanity.

We have faith in what we believe because we have a written history of God's covenants through the Old Testament, as well as a continuation of God's works throughout the history of the Church.

We also see proof of God's working in the sacraments through the uplifting effects that we experience in our souls and through the existence of things like eucharistic miracles.

Finally, my greatest sign of proof that the Catholic Church has it right is the peace that comes when encountering Christ in eucharistic Adoration. When we come before the Lord, truly present in the Eucharist, although our problems may not disappear, if we come with a truly open heart, we will in fact find rest and the love that our hearts long for. If you've never experienced this, then I encourage you to try it out and to invite those friends taking the comparative religion class to do the same.

So that's a long way of saying that it's OK to attend services of other religions, so long as you do all that you can to grow in your own faith at the same time.

God Bless you!

This month's YO Father question is answered by Father Keith Romke. Send your questions to youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org.

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