

## **View from the Pew**

*by Meredith Mackin Rilley*

In speaking about the cancer that recently took his life, Bobby Murcer once said, “First, and I believe this with all my heart, you have to be blessed by the grace of God. Every step I’ve taken [since my diagnosis], I have had a great guide. The greatest. If [my wife] and I are absolutely certain about one thing in this world, it’s that God has guided us on this journey. I don’t even want to think about where we would be right now without Him.” It is exactly that optimism and faith that caused Bobby Murcer to be one of the most loved Yankees of all time. In success, and especially in facing obstacles, people often overlook giving thanks. Bobby Murcer used both situations as a time to show gratitude to God for the many gifts he had been given.

On Monday, August 18th, award-winning speaker, John Buckley, will speak to the men of St. Edward’s Parish about Bobby Murcer and how his God-led life, full of family, hope and faith, was rich until the end. Buckley, who works as the Director of Retreat Promotion and Director of the Physical Plant for the Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center in West Hartford, said, “Bobby Murcer’s faith-based life gave him a wonderful life and tremendous courage until the end of his terminal illness.” Buckley’s presentation will no doubt uplift and give hope to all its listeners.

It is this optimism that is a constant offering at Holy Family, where John hopes to inspire men to visit. Holy Family, located in Farmington, CT, is well known for their men’s retreats, yet they have expanded to include women, teen, youth leadership, recovery, marriage and more. The Retreat Center is run by the Passionists, a Catholic community of priests, brothers, sisters and lay associates, who are globally known for their warm hospitality and gentle compassion. That claim of hospitality and compassion is championed by everyone who attends one of its retreats.

“I have been involved in retreats since 1963 at [five different centers] and Holy Family is the most outstanding of all. The staff is beyond reproach. The music lifts your heart and the food is so good. [The presentation of all this together] shows that friendship and love help [in finding God in your daily life],” said Bill O’Keeffe, this year’s Retreat Chairperson for St. Edward’s.

Retreatants often leave Holy Family with a Bobby Murcer-like-gratitude. O’Keeffe said, “[What attracts me to the retreats] is that there is a group of men together, praying and thanking God for all their gifts. Some people feel that they should get what they deserve. I don’t believe that. You get what you get, because the good Lord gave it to us.”

Another retreat veteran is Bill McDermott. Bill’s wife, Doris, encouraged him to try his first retreat. “I had been suggesting to him for a while to go and he kept saying no.” Bill explained, “It took 4 or 5 years of contemplation to realize that a retreat was something I should try. I had heard people talk about their positive experiences, but I still didn’t think it was for me. Doris said, ‘It’s only a weekend. Give it a try.’ You know, it’s like trying to lose weight: sometimes it takes a while to realize it’s what you should do.” As

testimony, Bill offered that he is about to go on his fifth retreat. “I haven’t missed a year yet!”

Retreats are commonly passed off by people as “not being for them”, yet those who decide to take that leap of and for faith never regret going. In fact, most feel enlightened and have a healthy reminder that they’re not in this life alone. Bill Brockner, a new retreat convert, having been to two at Holy Family, identifies with that very thought. “I find [going] very moving. When I get back into normal life, I feel more at ease with everything and sense God is with me.”

Like Bill McDermott, Bill Brockner wasn’t sure it was for him. He didn’t think he wanted to be away from the house and his yard work all weekend. “Once I went, though, my wife observed that I was more relaxed, at ease and at peace. Until you go and hear the music and go to the chapel, you can’t really understand how it is [on a retreat]. You really get a sense of how blessed life truly is. You come away with a stronger sense that you can reach and talk to God -- that He is there.” The sentiment of God awareness and a new closeness with God is a universal opinion among retreatants, yet the degree to which one experiences this is individual. Bill McDermott explained, “You grow in faith to the degree that it applies to you.”

A common misconception about retreats, is that it is a silence-induced weekend, full of contemplation. While that is an option some retreatants take, most opt to take part in the workshops held on Saturdays. The 2008-2009 retreat theme is “We Are Called -- Finding Our Life’s Purpose”. Speaking to that theme, some of this year’s workshop topics are: Centering Prayer, How to Make Spiritually-Based Decisions, Dealing with Disappointment, Spirituality and Finance, Stress Reduction, and more. What’s particularly accommodating is the option to be involved as much, or as little, as a participant wishes. There’s no pressure to take part in anything at all -- or to even leave one’s room.

Relating to the “We Are Called” theme, John Buckley explained, “We have abundant choices along with some unexpected detours and we often lose our way. Having a purpose in life, a ‘calling’ that keeps us focused, is what we aim to find on our life’s journey, but that purpose can seem hidden and unclear at the many intersections along the way. Sometimes we need to stop along the road of our human sojourn. We need to check our direction, establish our position, and discern the path that God is calling us to travel. A retreat can be that kind of respite.”

Holy Family, with its private rooms, its unanimously praised and acclaimed food and music, its 48 acres of walking trails, woods, and fields, may seem like an alluring mini-vacation spot. Vacations are relaxing, but retreats are about more than a getaway -- vacations aren’t typically centered on self-discovery and closeness with God. It’s like Bill McDermott said, “It’s nice to go away with your family, but oftentimes it’s not your agenda -- it’s someone else’s. You leave your cell at home, kiss the family goodbye for a couple of days, and leave the pressures of day-to-day life behind. A retreat is your chance to meet your own agenda.” On a retreat, it’s about you and God.

Gene Cassavecchia, the Danbury area Vice President in the Men's Retreat League talked about how he initially became involved in retreats. "Fourteen years ago, Monsignor Ryan put a little notice in the church bulletin about a gathering of men. I went along with about 13 other fellows -- all curious. Holy Family was there and they spoke about their mission. I have been going on retreats there ever since. [This next retreat] will be my 15th one." Certainly, there's something to that.

For more information on the Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center, go to [www.holyfamilyretreat.org](http://www.holyfamilyretreat.org). John Buckley's talk for men about Bobby Murcer will take place on Monday, August 18th at 7:30 at the St. Edward's Parish Hall.