includes books on theology, church history, spirituality, and art history, with a special focus on those which bear upon the Dominican Order.

We hold him in our hearts and pray for continued blessings on his life and ministry.

At the same time, we are delighted that Fr. Gabriel Pivarnik, O.P., assistant professor of theology and a member of the Province of St. Joseph, has agreed to succeed Fr. McGonigle as director of the Center. Fr. Pivarnik is a graduate of the College of William and Mary, where he majored in history and presented a thesis entitled “African-American Autobiographies and Changing Historical Perspectives”, the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, where he received his M.Div. and S.T.L.; and most recently The Catholic University of America where he received his S.T.D. in sacramental theology. Popular with his students and with faculty colleagues, Fr. Pivarnik will bring great energy and a broad interest in all things Catholic and Dominican to his role as director of the Center.

Masses and Confessions at St. Dominic Chapel (when school is in session):

Masses for Sunday:
4:30 p.m. Saturday Vigil
4:30 p.m. Sunday
7:00 p.m. Sunday
10:30 p.m. Sunday

Weekday Masses:
11:35 a.m., 4:30 p.m. (Monday-Friday)
5:00 p.m. (Monday-Thursday)

Confessions:
3:30 P.M. - 4:30 P.M. Wednesday
8:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M. Wednesday
3:30 P.M. - 4:30 P.M. Saturday

A MEDITATION: A God with skin on

The son of my fondest memories from childhood is going to the library with my mother and younger brother. My brother and I would race one another to see who could get to the children’s section first, and when we did, invariably we were struck by the wonder of it all. Row after row of books, the stacks taller than our heads and the uppermost shelves a reach for little hands and arms. There were books about boys like us and books about children from far off places, stories about how cities were built and how to build birdhouses, books about animals and dinosaurs and the planets, and of course our favorites: Curious George, Hardy Boys, and the Time-Life series on nature and ancient civilizations.

My brother and I would sit side by side on the floor between the stacks reading, a pile of books on either side of us. While normally we would chat and tease one another, play at cowboys and Indians, or wrestle —imitating the holds of Killer Kowalski or Bobo Brazil—here we were silent. The only sounds were those of the turning page, the occasional shifting of position, and the distant, mumbled voices of the librarians and other patrons. Absorbed as we were in words that made even imaginary people and places feel real and immediate, time seemed to stand still.

And so it does each Christmas on campus. The students are gone. Exams are done, grades turned in, offices closed, and nary a phone call or email requires a reply. And if we are lucky as we were this Christmas, falling snow dampens the ordinary sounds of the city. For a few days, a week perhaps, time is unhurried and undemanding, and if one chooses to, one can become absorbed in words and the worlds they make real.

This Christmas I read Lit by Mary Karr, the Peck Professor of Literature at Syracuse University. A memoir about her plunge into alcoholism and her far more difficult climb to sobriety, it is alternately funny, haunting, and both irreverent and devout. It is also consistently and unsparring honest.
At one point she describes how, having tried sobriety on her own terms and failed every time, she reluctantly accepted the fact that she needed the assistance of others. But she was not yet ready to accept God’s help. In fact she refused and burned, and railed against the very notion of God and of getting down on her knees to “pray to the air molecules.” So a fellow alcoholic, an elegant if somewhat tweedy Harvard academic, said to her, “If you need God with skin on, go to your group and ask the first person you see.”

The notion of turning to a member of her AA meeting as her “Higher Power” struck her as being nearly as absurd as praying to God. After all, the meeting was an odd assemblage of the Chanel wearing and the tattoo sprouting, of bakers and professors, students and the workaholic. But grudgingly she took the advice. In doing so she discovered that grace can be found in improbable places and, in time, found her way to prayer, and faith, and eventually to the Church.

Reading this on the eve of Christmas, I could not help but be struck by the phrase, “God with skin on.” This is the very wonder and mystery of Christmas: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). But the wonder and mystery does not stop here. It goes on to include a woman afraid for his life, caught by the hand of Jesus and led to and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). But the wonder and mystery, then, is both that God has skin to take hold of and that it is within the grasp of us all. This was true in Bethlehem of course, but also Jerusalem, and then too it is true in Providence and in whatever corner of the world is ours. It wraps around the comedy and those who are not, around family and friends, foes and the stranger. Sometimes it is seen for what it is but most often not; just another drunk trying to stay sober, we think, or a child reading a book.

But God’s compassion is wider than we know. For when the upper shelves of faith seem too high for us to reach, and when prayer seems like speaking “to molecules of air”, it is a God with skin on who sits by our side, his Word bringing distant things near and making the improbable real.

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