

**PRAY** Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13.4-8



**F**ather G-dog, or G for short, is Jesuit priest Greg Boyle. He is Executive Director of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, a program that gives gang members



February 2, 2025 • Vol. 37, No. 17 • Presentation of the Lord

hope for a life. *Dog* is gang slang for *best friend*.

“A great many kids in my neighborhood don’t plan their futures; they plan their funerals,” says Father Greg. “They ask me to do them and plan the songs to sing.”

From 1986 to 1992, Father Greg was pastor of Dolores Mission, the poorest parish in the Los Angeles Archdiocese. The small, stuccoed church with a red tile roof sits on a corner in the largest public housing development west of the Mississippi. For the neighborhood, it’s a corner

of hope. The church houses a shelter for 65 people. Children attend school across the street.

Dolores Mission is in the 16-square-mile, Hollenbeck Police Precinct, which has 36 criminal gangs and 6,400 gang members. “LA is the gang capital of the world,” explains Father Greg. “This little corner, this little postage stamp square on the map, is the gang capital of LA.”

Father Greg created “Jobs For A Future” in 1988 to develop positive alternatives—an elementary school, a day care program, and finding

**The Solution  
Is HOPE**





**Jobs for a Future has a tattoo-removal service. A machine identifies the lines of the tattoo and applies a 10-second, 2nd-degree burn that hurts but disperses and blurs the ink. Gustavo Mojica displays his arm after three treatments.**

legitimate employment for young people.

In 1992, Father Greg launched the first business, Homeboy Bakery. It provided training, work experience, and above all, the opportunity for rival gang members to work side by side. The success of the bakery led to additional businesses. Homeboy Industries became an independent non-profit organization in 2001. Today its enterprises include Homeboy Bakery, Homeboy Silkscreen, Homeboy Maintenance, Homeboy/Homegirl Merchandise, and Homegirl Café.

"We have 250 to 300 employees, all of them from different gangs, half of them enemies," explains Father Greg.

**H**omeboy Industries has new headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The move downtown—two blocks from Union Station in gang neutral territory—has opened services up to all of LA County. "Homeboy serves as a beacon of hope for those seeking to leave gang life, for whom the barriers and challenges are great, and for whom there is virtually no other avenue to enter the mainstream," says Father Greg.

Father Greg wants to translate the word *blessed* that begins each of the beatitudes a new way. The usual beatitudes say, "Blessed are the single-hearted. Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are those who struggle for justice." Father Greg reflects, "Scholars tell us it is closer to the original language to say, 'You're in the right place if you are single-hearted. You're in the right place if you struggle and work for justice. You're in the right place if they persecute you and if they hate you, if they speak ill of you.'

"The beatitudes tell us where we need to be. To stand with those who are at the margin, who have had their dignity denied—that is the place of the passion and joy. That is where Jesus is."

Father Greg sees his work as telling young people the truth about who they are. "These youth have distorted images of themselves, so we hold up a mirror. Here's who you are. You're exactly who God made you to be.

"This is like the kid who told me not to worry about getting gas even though my gauge said E. 'What do you think E means?' I asked him.

"'Enough,' he says.

"'What do you think F means?'

"'Finished,' he says.

"The kids who come to my office look in the mirror and see empty. It is our communal task to tell them, 'You have goodness, gifts, and talents. You are enough. You are who God wants you to be.'"

**M**oreno returns from probation camp and shows me his transcript. "Straight A's," he says. I open his transcript; I see two B's, two C's, and one A; I think, "Close enough." I say to him, "If you were my son, I would be the proudest man alive." He moves his fingers to his eyes to stop tears.

**I realize his mother is a crack addict who has disappeared. His father is in state prison and will never leave prison alive. His grandmother, who is raising him, is a good woman but not effective. I buried his very best friend a month earlier; he was killed in our streets.**

**"I bet you are afraid to be out, aren't you?"**

**My question presses the play button on his tear ducts, and he dissolves in tears. "It's going to be OK," I say.**

**He wipes away his tears and with defiance says, "I just want to have a life!"**

**I said, "Who told you you would never have one? In all those letters from camp you wrote about all the things you learned about yourself. The gifts and talents you didn't know you had. At the moment you think you are in a deep dark hole, but the truth is you are in a tunnel. If you keep walking, the light is going to show up. I can see it; I'm taller than you are. And after all, (I hand him back his transcripts) straight A's."**

Father G joins in giving young people the message they don't hear. "It is our collective task," he says, "to hold the mirror up to each other, but especially to those on the margins whose dignity has been denied, who are voiceless, whose burdens and needs are more than they can bear."



Father Greg thinks gang violence is a symptom. "It is the cough that indicates you are allergic to your cat," he says. "Gang violence points beyond itself to poverty, to families that don't function because of despair, unemployment, and racism. Gang violence tells us that we haven't dealt with access to education, to medical care, to opportunities in general."

**O**ne day I was about to say Mass. I saw police officers patting down three little gang members. They didn't find anything. One officer took this huge wad of gum out of his mouth and put it in the tiniest kid's hair, a kid named Ernie. Then he took



# SUNDAY GOSPEL

Presentation of the Lord

## Jesus Is Light for All Peoples

**NARRATOR 1:** When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to God, as is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to God."

**NARRATOR 2:** They came to offer a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of God, "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons."

**NARRATOR 1:** There lived in Jerusalem at the time a certain man named Simeon. He was just and pious, awaiting the consolation of

Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested upon him. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen God's Anointed One.

**NARRATOR 2:** He came into the temple inspired by the Spirit. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do the customary ritual of the law, Simeon received him in his arms and blessed God.

**SIMEON:** Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace; you have fulfilled your word. My eyes have seen your salvation which you

have prepared before all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

**NARRATOR 1:** When Mary and Joseph completed everything required by the law of God, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

**NARRATOR 2:** The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

Luke 2.22-40

the baseball cap that had been thrown on the ground and smooshed it on Ernie's head, rubbing the gum into his hair.

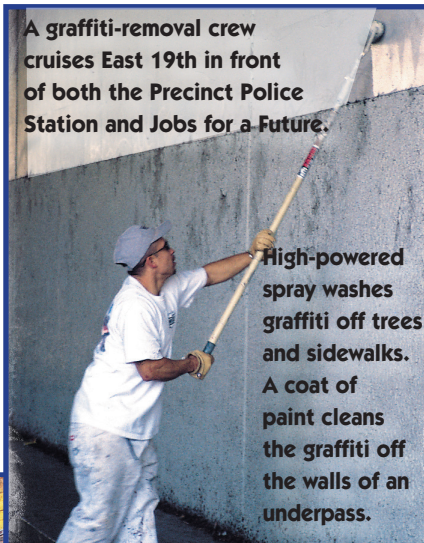
The next day I went to the Captain of the Police and asked him, "What do you think the police officer's hope was in doing that to this kid?" The Captain said something to me that I've heard before, "Father, our strategy is a simple one. Make life as miserable as we possibly can for the gang member."

I told him that is redundant in our community. Life is already miserable for the gang member. In fact, gangs are the places kids go when they have encountered their life as misery.

Those officers asked themselves, "What's wrong with these three kids?" They thought they just aren't scared enough. The truth is they are just not hopeful enough.

In Father Greg's analysis, "Violence is the urban poor's version of suicide, the way kids act out the self-destructive urge. If the problem is really despair, which I think it is, the solution is hope. Ask people who work with at-risk youth to call

to mind their success stories. They will tell each kid had at least one loving, caring adult that paid attention. The surest antidote for the despair is the hope of one adult showing up."



**QUESTIONS** 1 Why do kids in East LA plan their funerals rather than their futures? 2 What is the mirror Father G holds up to gang kids? 3 How does hope solve gang kids' problems? 4 What word does Jesus fulfill? 5 What light does Jesus bring to you? 6 What does Jesus help us see about God?

## Jesus, Compassion of God

**J**esus grew up among the poor who worked each day to survive. This is how 95% of the people in Israel lived in Jesus' time. In the village of Nazareth many people farmed small plots of land, growing wheat for flour. They pressed oil for making bread from olives. They had fruit trees and grape vines. Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, worked as a carpenter among the poor.

By teaching the poor, healing the sick, and gathering all that believe in him into a new community, Jesus demonstrates that God walks with every person. Jesus reveals the compassion of God.

In his death on the cross, Jesus suffers the same violence and indignity many suffer in our world. He prays, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He dies, feeling abandoned. Jesus' resurrection testifies God does not abandon him or us.

Jesus teaches us to love as God loves—to love even our enemies and to turn the other cheek rather than escalate violence. "Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate," Jesus says. Love. Lend. Do not judge. Pardon. Give.

These teachings come from Jesus' Sermon on the Plain in Luke's gospel, a collection of Jesus' sayings. Matthew has a similar collection called the Sermon on the Mount.

**W**here do we get ideas about who Jesus is? As Catholics today, we learn about who Jesus is and what he teaches first of all from the four gospels. The gospel narratives tell us what Jesus taught, what he did

for people, how he died and rose. We read from the gospels at every Eucharist.

Also as Catholics, we belong to a community of believers two millennia old. The first Christians were Jews who relied on Israel's scriptures to reflect on who Jesus is. Very early nonJews became Christians, too. These Gentile Christians used their Greek learning and philosophy to think about Jesus. From these Christians of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, we inherit the Creeds that tell us Jesus is "the only begotten Son of God, begotten not made, one in Being with the Father."

Besides the gospels and creeds, Catholics today learn about Jesus from how we worship. From the beginning Christians have gathered to remember and celebrate Jesus and break bread together as he asked. As we join in Eucharist, the words we pray reenact Jesus' story and teach us its meaning. We acclaim, "When we eat the Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again."

In every century popes and bishops have preached and taught the people in every corner of the world about the meaning of Jesus for their lives. They have preserved the teachings of the first apostles.

We continue to reflect on who Jesus is today. Artists portray Jesus in the skin colors and dress of all peoples. Andrew Lloyd Webber makes Jesus a superstar. Use the Jesus Is checklist to identify where your ideas of who Jesus is originate.

## Jesus is—

Fill in the circles of all the answers with which you agree.

- 1 ☐ An expert on the law of Moses.
- 2 ☒ One who comes to serve, not be served.
- 3 ☐ A compassionate healer.
- 4 ☒ A homeless preacher without possessions who is good news to the poor.
- 5 ☐ The Son of Man who will come in glory at the end of time.
- 6 ☒ A king whose kingdom is not of this world.
- 7 ☐ A witness who testifies to the truth.
- 8 ☒ A Spirit-filled prophet of God's favor.
- 9 ☐ The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- 10 ☒ Truly God and truly human.
- 11 ☐ Judge of the living and the dead.
- 12 ☒ The only begotten Son of the Father.
- 13 ☐ The one who asks us to break bread and share a cup of wine to remember him.
- 14 ☒ The best friend and influence I have.
- 15 ☐ A friend who carries me when I can't go on.
- 16 ☒ A man who is one of us, the stranger on the bus, the woman in the soup line.
- 17 ☐ An unforgettable friend who never gives up on anyone.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Identify where your ideas about who Jesus is come from. Statements 1-8 about Jesus originate in the gospels. Statements 9-13 originate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist and Nicene Creed we profess at Mass. Statements 14-17 come from contemporary sources.
- 2 Journal your own description of who Jesus is for you.
- 3 Draw a picture of Jesus. Do you picture him in the robes of his own historical period, in the clothes of our time, or how else? Which of his sayings is your favorite?