

Quo Vadis

The monthly newsletter of Saints Peter & Paul Orthodox Catholic Church of Bayonne, N.J.
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“Quo Vadis?” is a Latin phrase meaning “Where are you going?” It refers to a Christian tradition regarding St. Peter. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Peter is fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome, and along the road outside the city, he encounters the risen Jesus. Peter asks Jesus “Quo vadis?” Jesus replies “Romam vado iterum crucifigi” (“I am going to Rome to be crucified again”). St. Peter thereby gains the fortitude to return to the city, to eventually be martyred by being crucified upside-down. The phrase also occurs a few times in the Latin *Vulgate* translation of the *Holy Bible*, notably in John 13:36 when Peter asks Jesus the same question, to which He responds, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me.” The Church of Domine Quo Vadis in Rome is built where, according to tradition, the meeting between St. Peter and the risen Jesus Christ took place.

This parish newsletter is called **Quo Vadis** for a reason: to ask the question of where *you* are going in life. Is your life’s journey leading you towards Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? St. Peter, at a pivotal moment in his life, when he understandably felt like running away, found the courage to go where Jesus Christ would have him go. Where are *you* going? Will *you* follow Jesus Christ?

Rector’s Message

I am sorry to spoil your Christmas decorations before the Christmas lights have even gone up—but Jesus wasn’t born in a stable, and, curiously, the New Testament hardly even hints that this might have been the case. So where has the idea come from? The source is probably threefold: traditional elaboration; issues of grammar and meaning; and ignorance of first-century Palestinian culture.

The traditional elaboration has come about from reading the story through a ‘messianic’ understanding of Isaiah 1:3: “The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” The mention of a ‘manger’ in Luke’s nativity story, suggesting animals, led mediaeval illustrators to depict the ox and donkey recognizing the baby Jesus, so the natural setting was a stable—after all, isn’t that where animals are kept? Well, not necessarily—see below!

The issue of grammar and meaning, and perhaps the heart of the matter, is the translation of the Greek word *kataluma* in Luke 2:7. Older versions translate this as ‘inn’: “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (KJV). There is some reason for doing this; the word is used in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint, or LXX) to translate a term for a public place of hospitality

(e.g., as in Exodus 4:24 and 1 Samuel 9:22). And the etymology of the word is quite general. It comes from *kataluo*, meaning to unloose or untie; that is, to unsaddle one's horses and untie one's pack.

But some fairly decisive evidence in the opposite direction comes from its use elsewhere. It is the term for the private 'upper' room where Jesus and the disciples eat the 'Last Supper' (Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:11). This is clearly a reception room in a private home. And when Luke does mention an 'inn,' in the parable of the man who fell among thieves (Luke 10:34), he uses the more general term *pandocheion*, meaning a place in which all (travelers) are received, a caravanserai. The difference is made clear in this pair of definitions:

Kataluma (Greek) – “the spare or upper room in a private house or in a village, where travelers received hospitality and where no payment was expected” (ISBE 2004). A private lodging which is distinct from that in a public inn; i.e., caravanserai.

Pandocheion, pandokeion, pandokian (Greek) – In 5th century BC Greece, an inn used for the shelter of strangers (*pandokian* = 'all receiving'). The *pandokeion* had a common refectory and dormitory, with no separate rooms allotted to individual travelers (Firebaugh, 1928).

The third issue relates to our understanding, or rather ignorance, of the historical and social context of the story. In the first place, it would be unthinkable that Joseph, returning to his place of ancestral origins, would not have been received by family members, even if they were not close relatives. Moreover, the actual design of Palestinian homes (even to the present day) makes sense of the whole story. Most families would live in a single-room house, with a lower compartment for animals to be brought in at night, and either a room at the back for visitors, or space on the roof. The family living area would usually have hollows in the ground, filled with hay, in the living area, where the animals would feed.

This kind of one-room living with animals in the house at night is evident in a couple of places in the gospels. In Matthew 5:15, Jesus comments: “Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.” This makes no sense unless everyone lives in the one room! And in Luke's account of Jesus healing a woman on the sabbath (Luke 13:10–17), Jesus comments: “Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the manger [same word as Luke 2:7] and lead it out to give it water? Interestingly, none of Jesus' critics respond, 'No I don't touch animals on the Sabbath' because they all would have had to lead their animals from the house. In fact, one late manuscript variant reads 'lead it out from the house and give it water.'

What, then, does it mean for the *kataluma* to have 'no space'? It means that many, like Joseph and Mary, have travelled to Bethlehem, and the family guest room is already full, probably with other relatives who arrived earlier. So Joseph and Mary must stay somewhere else—perhaps with the family in the main room of the house? If so, the most natural place to lay the baby is in the hay-filled depressions at the lower end of the house where the animals are fed. This actually accords quite well with the fact that the birth place of Jesus in Bethlehem's Basilica of the Nativity is a grotto. If the house was built over a grotto, then that would be the natural place to store the animal feed!

The location of the Grotto of the Nativity was well known from the infancy of Christianity. St. Jerome tells us that the reason the Emperor Hadrian had the site above the grotto (i.e., the house) converted into a shrine, with a sacred grove, for Adonis, the mortal lover of Aphrodite, the Greek

goddess of beauty and desire, in AD 135 was to completely wipe out the memory of Jesus from the world. Moreover, in 248, Origen of Alexandria wrote the following about the grotto: "In Bethlehem the cave is pointed out where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. And the rumor is in those places, and among foreigners of the Faith, that indeed Jesus was born in this cave who is worshiped and revered by the Christians" (*Contra Celsum*, I.51).

So, the idea that the Holy Family was in a stable, away from others, alone and "outcast," is grammatically and culturally implausible. In fact, it is hard to be alone at all in such contexts. Anyone who has lodged with Palestinian peasants knows that notwithstanding their hospitality, the lack of privacy is unspeakably painful. You cannot have a room to yourself, and you are never alone by day or by night. Rather than some distance away in a stable, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are in the midst of the family, and all the visiting relations, possibly down a small flight of stairs (such as those used to enter the grotto today), right in the thick of it and demanding our attention.

Theological Excerpt

"The Incarnation is summed up in this, that the whole Son, that is, His manhood as well as His divinity, was permitted by the Father's gracious favor to continue in the unity of the Father's nature, and retained not only the powers of the divine nature, but also that nature's self. For the object to be gained was that man might become God."

— St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310-367), On the Trinity, IX.38.

Lives of the Saints

St. Melania the Younger – commemorated on December 31st

Born in 383, St. Melania was the only child of the rich and powerful Valerius Publicola (son of St. Melania the Elder) and his wife Caeionia Albina, both Christians, of the senatorial Valeria family of ancient lineage which was the pride of Rome. Her paternal and maternal relatives had held the highest offices of state with great distinction during the whole of the century, and Melania could even boast of a long line of imperial blood, most recently through Valerius Romulus (consul in 308-309). She was married to her paternal cousin, Valerius Pinianus, at the age of fourteen despite her protests. The fifth-century *Melaniae Junioris Vita* ("Life of Melania the Younger") says:

It was settled that the young couple, scarcely more than children, should reside with Publicola in his palace on the Caelian Hill. This was the cause of much suffering to Melania. Her fervor daily increased, and with it her horror of a life of luxury and sensual ease. Living constantly under her father's watchful eye, she was obliged to comply with his wishes, and to sustain the honor of the family by conforming to all the usages of Roman society. She had to dress with all the splendor befitting a matron of exalted rank, and to make her appearance in public surrounded with much state. All this was so repugnant to the young wife that it caused her real torture. She sought by the most ingenious devices to find an outlet for her spirit of penance and expiation.

St. Melania often pleaded for Pinianus to conform to asceticism so she could maintain her purity for the Lord, but Pinianus wanted continue the family line. Two children were in fact born,

yet neither survived. These deaths took a toll on the married couple and encouraged the choice of asceticism. This was especially difficult due to Roman societal standards and the familial patrimony present in Melania and Pinianus's life. Knowing that Melania wanted to practice a celibate lifestyle, her father, near death, asked for forgiveness for pushing the unwanted marriage years prior. Once her father passed, She and her husband embraced Christian asceticism and maintained a celibate life thereafter. As the sole heiress to her father and paternal grandfather, she inherited their wealth and enormous estates on the death of Publicola after seven years of marriage.

St. Melania decided to leave the palace for one of her villas in Spring 404. She was encouraged by her grandmother, St. Melania the Elder, who had also travelled from Jerusalem and held strong ascetic beliefs. Ascetics, and early Christian leaders believed that denying oneself worldly pleasures and desires was essential for spiritual growth and closeness to God. Her dislike of rich apparel had caused her suffering during her father's life, yet now led her to give away her silken robes as church altar cloths, including her gold ornaments, and everything that was rich and costly in her wardrobe. She demonstrated no desire of worldly possessions by wearing a garment of cheap, coarse wool, and fashioned rather to hide and disfigure her womanly form. She took a great number of poor families and slaves with her to her villa, whom she treated as brothers and sisters. Such actions were the result of asceticism.

The villa of the Valerii was supposedly of enormous size, as it was large enough to lodge the immense number of people whom Melania took with her from Rome. This, as we gather from Bishop Palladius, consisted of fifteen eunuchs, sixty young girls who were vowed to virginity, other free-born women, slaves, and more than thirty families who had followed Pinianus in his new mode of life. In addition to these regular guests, Melania's country house afforded hospitality to the pilgrims to Rome. Within existed numerous deputations of bishops and priests, who received every mark of honor and respect in the end of 404 and the beginning of 405, to plead the cause of St. John Chrysostom with Pope Innocent I. She dispensed lavish hospitality and spared no expense in the entertainment of her guests. Bishop Palladius, her hagiographer, speaks thankfully of the respectful welcome with which he was given during his sojourn, and of the large sum of money presented to him on his departure in February 406.

She decided to dispose of her vast estates and give the proceeds to ecclesiastical institutions and to the poor. This caused surprise and contempt amongst the Roman aristocracy who regarded the couple as lunatics. Some of their relatives considered that they now had an opportunity to enrich themselves extravagantly by taking advantage of the simplicity and inexperience of the couple. Melania's appeal to "Queen" Serena¹ and Emperor Honorius led him to order every province that their possessions should be sold at the responsibility of the governors and public administrators, and that they be responsible for the remittance of the price to the couple.

The sale of such enormous estates inevitably took several years to complete as even the smallest of Melania's properties yielded an income of abundant amount. Part of their estates remained unsold at the end of 408 due to the invasion of the Goths and siege of Rome. Their opponents contrived to take advantage of the critical state of affairs, with the secret co-operation of

¹ Serena was the daughter of Honorius, the brother of Theodosius I and son of Theodosius the Elder, and wife of the military commander Stilicho. In 409 Serena was falsely accused of conspiring with the Visigoths besieging Rome, and was executed on orders from the Roman Senate and her half-sister Galla Placidia.

the senate, by confiscating the remaining estates to the Treasury. They were supported in their plot by the prefect, Pompeianus, and the bill of confiscation had already been drafted. However, on the day when it was to be proclaimed by the prefect, the people rose in rebellion due to the shortage of bread. They seized Pompeianus, dragged him through the streets, and put him to death in the center of the city.

Not even the wealthiest Roman patricians had enough cash to buy Melania's properties. The eventual purchasers were unable to pay the full price at once, so the owners were obliged to accept promissory notes. Melania's palace on the Caelian Hill, which she was the most anxious to dispose of, was magnificent and contained an accumulation of riches so great that it was impossible to find a purchaser. It remained unsold, and in 410, after being pillaged by Alaric's barbarian hordes and partly destroyed by fire, it was given away for nothing.

Melania and Pinianus left Rome in 408 with her mother Albina and Rufinus of Aquileia², an old friend of the family, to live a monastic life near Messina (Sicily) for two years. They resided in the magnificent villa (probably Pistunina) that they owned on the western shore of the straits, opposite Reggio Calabria, surrounded beautifully by both sea and land. Meanwhile Melania was occupied in disposing of her remaining property, the proceeds of which she distributed in alms and other donations. After the sack of Rome by the Visigoth Alaric, the invaders marched upon Southern Italy, and destroyed Reggio. Melania witnessed the fires from across the straits.

Fear of the invaders drove Melania to seek a safer refuge. Africa was regarded as a safe haven by many Roman families who had already emigrated to Carthage. Having sold many of her possessions in Italy and Sicily and after the death of Rufinus in 410, they decided to travel to Africa. Before their departure, they attempted to visit St. Paulinus of Nola, but according to Gerontius of Jerusalem, a storm forced the ship to an unnamed island (probably Lipari) that had been ravaged by pirates who held the inhabitants for ransom. Melania ransomed the islanders with her own money. Finally, they continued directly to Africa, where they befriended the great St. Augustine of Hippo and devoted themselves to a life of piety and charitable works.

Rather than in a city such as Carthage or Hippo, they chose to live in relative calm at their estate, near Thagaste in present Algeria. The estate was of such extent and importance as to include two episcopal sees, one belonging to the Catholic Church, the other to the Donatists. Some of the rooms of the villa were "filled with gold." St. Alypius was the famous bishop there with whom they became friends and had close relations with Paulinus and Augustine. Alypius had helped establish Augustine's first monastery in Africa. The church in Thagaste had been very poor but Melania furnished it with gold and silver cups, and with altar-cloths richly embroidered in gold and thickly sewn with pearls. She endowed this church with extensive property including a large part of the town itself.

On the advice of the principal bishops, Ss. Augustine, Alypius, and Aurelius of Carthage, she was also generous to the other churches and monasteries in Africa. She assigned a regular income to make them independent of precarious almsgiving. They stayed for seven years and founded a convent for the consecrated virgins who were once her slaves, yet treated as her sisters. Melania became Mother Superior, and also founded a cloister of which Pinianus took charge. Melania

² Rufinus of Aquileia (344–411) was an early Christian monk, philosopher, historian, and theologian who worked to translate Greek patristic works, especially those of Origen of Alexandria, into Latin.

practiced severe penance and wore haircloth, and at night she snatched brief rest on the hard ground as her bed, and her diet consisted of herbs or vegetables prepared with a little oil.

In 417, they travelled to Palestine by way of Alexandria. In Palestine, they lived in a hermitage near the Mount of Olives, where St. Melania founded a second convent. After the death of Pinianus circa 420, Melania built a cloister for men, and a church, where she spent the remainder of her life. She reposed on December 31, 439, the date on which her feast is observed in the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Roman Catholic Churches. Today, the town of Sainte-Mélanie in Quebec, Canada is named in her honor.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it that Orthodox churches traditionally do not have pews?

First-time visitors to some Orthodox churches may be surprised at seeing no pews or chairs in the nave. This is because most worshippers in Orthodox tradition stand during the service. When the prophets saw visions of saints worshipping in heaven, the saints were standing (Isaiah 6:2; 1 Kings 22:19; Daniel 7:10; Revelation 7:11). Additionally, the saints in the Old Testament were said to be standing during their worship (2 Chronicles 5:12; 6:2; 20:5, 13; Nehemiah 8:7; 9:4-6). In fact, it is technically forbidden to kneel on Sundays or during the Paschal season. This tradition is a broader reflection of the Orthodox Church's commitment to follow the Bible's prescription for worship as closely as possible. In fact, pews were not a tradition in Roman Catholicism either—they appeared with the Protestant Reformation, in which the sermon (often very long!), when it was permitted to sit, assumed centrality in Protestant worship services.

So why do many Orthodox churches in the United States and Canada have pews today?

The most likely answer is “Americanization.” As the first or second American-born generations assumed leadership positions in Orthodox parishes in the U.S. and Canada, the desire at the time to become more “American” (or “Canadian”) resulted in an adoption of the norms of Western church furnishings, and so pews were installed in many established Orthodox churches in the years following the Second World War. Furthermore, with the increase in longevity since that time, a much greater proportion of worshippers are now quite elderly and physically cannot stand for very long (in churches without pews, benches along the walls are often available for those unable to stand). So, according to the principle of *oikonomia*, concessions may be made due to cultural and practical factors, though for those who are able-bodied, standing ought to be the norm in worship.

Recipe of the Month

The Queen's Christmas Pudding

English Christmas pudding is a holiday dessert that dates back to medieval times. Don't let the American definition of “pudding” confuse you³ — this dish is more cake-like than custard-like. Queen Elizabeth II disdained extravagance and this Christmas pudding fits the bill, with no added sugar and crystalized ginger and salt as the only spices. Nevertheless, it's spectacular and delicious—perfect as is! Serve warm with vanilla ice cream, heavy cream, or crème anglaise.

³ In the British Isles and some Commonwealth countries, the word “pudding” is used to describe both sweet and savory dishes. However, it usually means dessert, and in the United Kingdom, “pudding” is used as a synonym for “dessert.”

INGREDIENTS

- 15 medium Medjool dates, pitted and chopped
- 1 cup dried apricots, chopped
- ¼ cup currants
- ⅓ cup golden raisins
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- ⅓ cup finely chopped crystallized ginger
- 3 tablespoons whiskey
- 1 large orange, zested and juiced
- 10 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 large egg, beaten
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ cups roughly chopped pecans (optional)
- ½ cup dry bread crumbs
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- maple syrup (for glazing the top)
- 4 chopsticks

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select a heat-proof bowl of any size or shape and generously grease with butter.
2. Combine dates, apricots, currants, raisins, cranberries, ginger, whiskey, orange zest, and orange juice in a mixing bowl. Toss thoroughly to combine.
3. Pour in melted butter and stir until everything is evenly coated. Mix in egg, heavy cream, and buttermilk. Add salt, pecans, bread crumbs, and flour and mix until batter is very thick and sticky.
4. Transfer dough to the prepared bowl and press it down to flatten with a spatula. Place a circle of parchment paper over the top and press down to seal. Stretch 2 pieces of plastic wrap over the bowl, then place the bowl on a third piece of plastic wrap. Bring the ends up and over the bowl and seal tightly. Cover the bowl with 2 pieces of foil, then tie a piece of string around and secure tightly.
5. Pudding can be cooked immediately if need be, but better if left to rest in the refrigerator, 8 hours to overnight.
6. Lay chopsticks in the bottom of a large Dutch oven. Place the wrapped pudding on the chopsticks and fill the Dutch oven halfway with water.
7. Place over high heat, cover, and bring to a boil. As soon as it boils, reduce heat to medium and steam, covered, for 4 hours, checking every hour to see if you need to add more water.
8. Use kitchen towels and carefully lift the pudding out of the Dutch oven. Snip the string, take off the foil, remove the plastic wrap, and peel off the parchment. Place a plate over the bowl and invert the pudding to unmold.
9. Brush maple syrup over top. Cut and serve immediately.

Parish News

Confessions

All parishioners ought to go to confession during the Nativity Fast, which may be heard after any Vespers or call the Rectory at 201-436-3244 to make a special appointment.

Parish Council Meeting

Parish Council is meeting in the church hall on Sunday, December 15, 2024 after Divine Liturgy.

Christmas Social

The Carpathian Club invites all our parishioners and visitors to its annual Christmas Social, which shall be held after Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day in the club hall behind the church building.

Archpastoral Visitation

Archbishop Michael's annual visitation to our church will be on Friday, December 27, 2024, the 3rd Day of Christmas and feast of Protomartyr Stephen. There will be a brunch in the church hall after Divine Liturgy—all in attendance are welcome!

Donations Received for Restoration

St. John's and St. Nicholas' Crosses, with their paired candlesticks, were refurbished by a donation from Helen Wanko in memory of John Wanko. The table cross and candlesticks on the tetrapod table were refurbished by a donation from Reader Stephen Wasilewski.

Special Donations

Special Donations may be offered at \$15 for the Altar Vigils, \$10 for the Sanctuary Lamp, and \$5 for any one of the following: St. John's Cross, St. Nicholas' Cross, and Triple Candelabra, and may be offered in memory of the departed or in honor of the living. For acknowledgement of Special Donations in the January issue, the donation must be recorded in the Special Donations register in the church vestibule by December 15, 2024.

December 1, 2024

Triple Candelabra offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Richard Leo O'Malley.

December 8, 2024

Altar Vigils offered by Helen Wanko in memory of Lydia Wanko (anniversary of birth). **St. Nicholas' Cross** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Bishop Anthony (Grabbe).

December 22, 2024

Altar Vigils offered by Helen Wanko in memory of June Bianchini (anniversary of birth).

December 29, 2024

Sanctuary Lamp offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Angelo and Marilyn Cusano.

Schedule of Services

Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2024

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

December 6, 2024 [St. Nicholas]

9:30 AM (Friday) – Divine Liturgy

December 7-8, 2024

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

December 14-15, 2024

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

December 21-22, 2024

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

December 24-25, 2024 [Nativity of Christ]

4:30 PM (Tuesday) – Vigil w. Lity
9:30 AM (Wednesday) – Divine Liturgy

December 26-27, 2024 [2nd & 3rd Days]

9:30 AM (Thursday) – Divine Liturgy
9:30 AM (Friday) – Divine Liturgy

December 28-29, 2024

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

Daily Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 2:4-10; Luke 18:18-27
2. 1 Thessalonians 2:20-3:8; Luke 20:27-44
3. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:12-19
4. 1 Thess. 4:1-12; Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24
5. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8; Luke 21:28-33
6. Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 6:17-23
7. 2 Corinthians 11:1-6; Luke 13:18-29
8. Ephesians 2:14-22; Luke 17:12-19
9. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Mark 8:11-21
10. 2 Thessalonians 1:10-2:2; Mark 8:22-26
11. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Mark 8:30-34
12. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5; Mark 9:10-16
13. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18; Mark 9:33-41
14. Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 14:1-11
15. Colossians 3:4-11; Luke 14:16-24
16. 1 Timothy 1:1-7; Mark 9:42-10:1
17. 1 Timothy 1:8-14; Mark 10:2-12
18. 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2:8-15; Mark 10:11-16
19. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Mark 10:17-27
20. 1 Timothy 4:4-8, 16; Mark 10:23-32
21. Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 16:10-15
22. Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40; Matt. 1:1-25
23. 1 Timothy 5:1-10; Mark 10:46-52
24. 1 Timothy 5:11-21; Mark 11:11-23
25. Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-12
26. Hebrews 2:11-18; Matthew 2:13-23
27. Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60; Matthew 21:33-42
28. Galatians 5:22-6:2; Luke 17:3-10
29. Galatians 1:11-19; Matthew 2:13-23
30. 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Mark 12:13-17
31. 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; Mark 12:18-27

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parish every time you shop!**



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available for purchase in the church vestibule.*