

# YOUTH FEATURE

## Corning girl demonstrates daily devotion to faith

### Teen's example inspires friends

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

CORNING — When the tears started pouring her face, she had no logical explanation why.

Then again, this unforgettable experience was not something the brain was meant to sort out.

Only the deepest part of Mary Jackson's soul knows exactly what transpired one Saturday last November.

It happened while Mary was on confirmation retreat with the Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community. She had been ill all afternoon and had considered going home, but managed to join her fellow teenagers for an evening prayer session.

When Father Paul Bonacci presented a monstrance — a sacred vessel displaying the Holy Eucharist — before the confirmation group, Mary recalled, "I felt perfect."

"I didn't feel sick at all; I had all this energy," she added. "A second later I started crying, and no one else was crying. I just couldn't control myself. I didn't understand why I was crying, but I knew I felt better."

"It was just a feeling you couldn't get anywhere on earth. Then Father John (Hayes) came over and said, 'Mary, tears are a gift from God.'"

Since that time, Mary, 16, has been feverishly devoted to practicing her Catholic faith. When her morning paper route is done, she regularly attends 6:45 a.m. weekday Mass at St. Patrick's Church. She's often accompanied by her father, Andrew.

"It just gets better and better," said Mary. "I don't think I could have done it by myself, so I asked God for the energy to get up and go. Now I go every day, I just love it so much."

"When I first started going (to daily Mass), I felt kind of uncomfortable or stupid because most of the people are older. But they are so nice to me, and make me feel so welcome."

Mary admits that the same inviting attitude hasn't been quite as prevalent at Corning East High School, where she recently completed her freshman year.

Although Mary says she doesn't force her beliefs on her schoolmates, word has spread about her faith life, and she's occasionally been the target of ridicule. Yet she no longer senses anger toward her detractors; instead, she concludes that those people are "just unsure."

If anything, her reputation at Corning East as a faithful youth has created far more positive results. By the end of the school year, she was leading discussions near her locker — with as many as 10 students taking part — about what she learned while attending Mass that day.

"A lot of people have questions," said Mary. "They're like, 'Whoa, look at how God has changed you.' Now that they see it in someone else, they're willing and eager to find out. I just try to give them whatever I know, but not turn them away. A lot of my friends have told me they wouldn't be where they are spiritually if it wasn't for me."

In addition to her regular Mass attendance, Mary is an altar server at St. Patrick's as well as a member of the Corning-Painted Post cluster's youth group. She is also a three-sport athlete at Corning East and participates in the high school's chorus, student council and Interact volunteer group.

When asked about her long-term plans, Mary said she has considered becoming a woman religious. She is still uncertain, however, about the vocation to which her faith journey is leading her.

"I know ministry's in my future somehow. I'm willing to do whatever God wants me to do," she concluded.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Mary Jackson, a parishioner in the Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community, regularly attends 6:45 a.m. weekday Mass at St. Patrick's Church. She is also active in several parish activities as well as at Corning East High School, where she will be a sophomore in the fall.

### Distinguished author schedules September lecture

LANANDAIGUA — Tom Danzig, noted author, speaker and editor for St. Mary's Press, will appear this fall at the Notre Dame Retreat Center, 515 State Road.

Danzig is slated to lecture Wednesday, Sept. 27, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. His topic will be "The Development of Catholic Identity Among Young People."

He will also speak at a Sept. 28 session, scheduled to run from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., on "The Process of Conversion and Ministry to Youth."

Single day, two-day and overnight packages are available. For details, call Jeannie Raisbeck at 716/328-3210. People living outside Monroe County may call toll free, 1-800-888-7177.

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