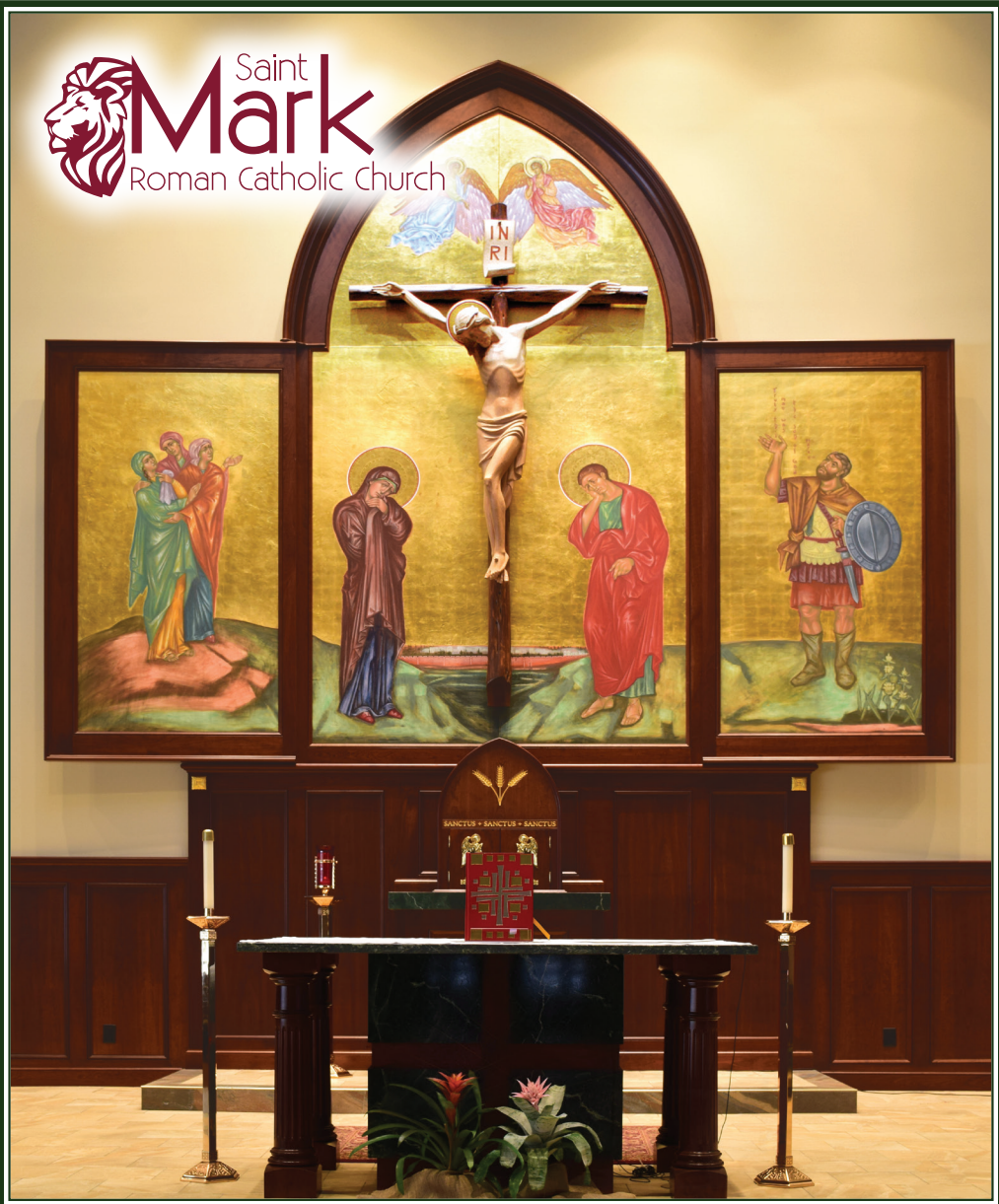


 Saint
Mark
Roman Catholic Church



The Icons of St. Mark Church

How it came to be

In 2013, St. Mark Roman Catholic Church in Fallston, Maryland, renovated the sanctuary to celebrate its 125th anniversary, and to inspire and deepen the spiritual experience. The pastor, Fr. Gerard Francik, commissioned Ioana Belcea, a liturgical artist from Northern Virginia, to create a triptych as a focal point around the crucifix and above the altar. Ioana's inspiration beautifully blended the parish's existing centerpiece, a western style art sculptured crucifix, together with eastern style icons to create a truly unique expression. This may be the only known icon triptych blending both art styles.

The spiritual path depicted in the triptych pulls us toward our hope in the Resurrection of our Lord. Through these reflections, from the artist's personal notes of inspiration, we invite you to embark on a deeper connection with those present at the crucifixion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Scene

Ioana chose the crucifixion as our focus, a momentous historic event with the Holy Mother and St. John at the foot of the cross. Conversely, she conveys, through statue-like figures, the timeless, everlasting reality of Christ's sacrifice. The emotion here is not a temporary melodrama of events and feelings. Rather, it conveys a stillness that portrays emotions and events so profound and powerful that mere words are unable to express the unending truth and drama of Christ's love and resurrection.

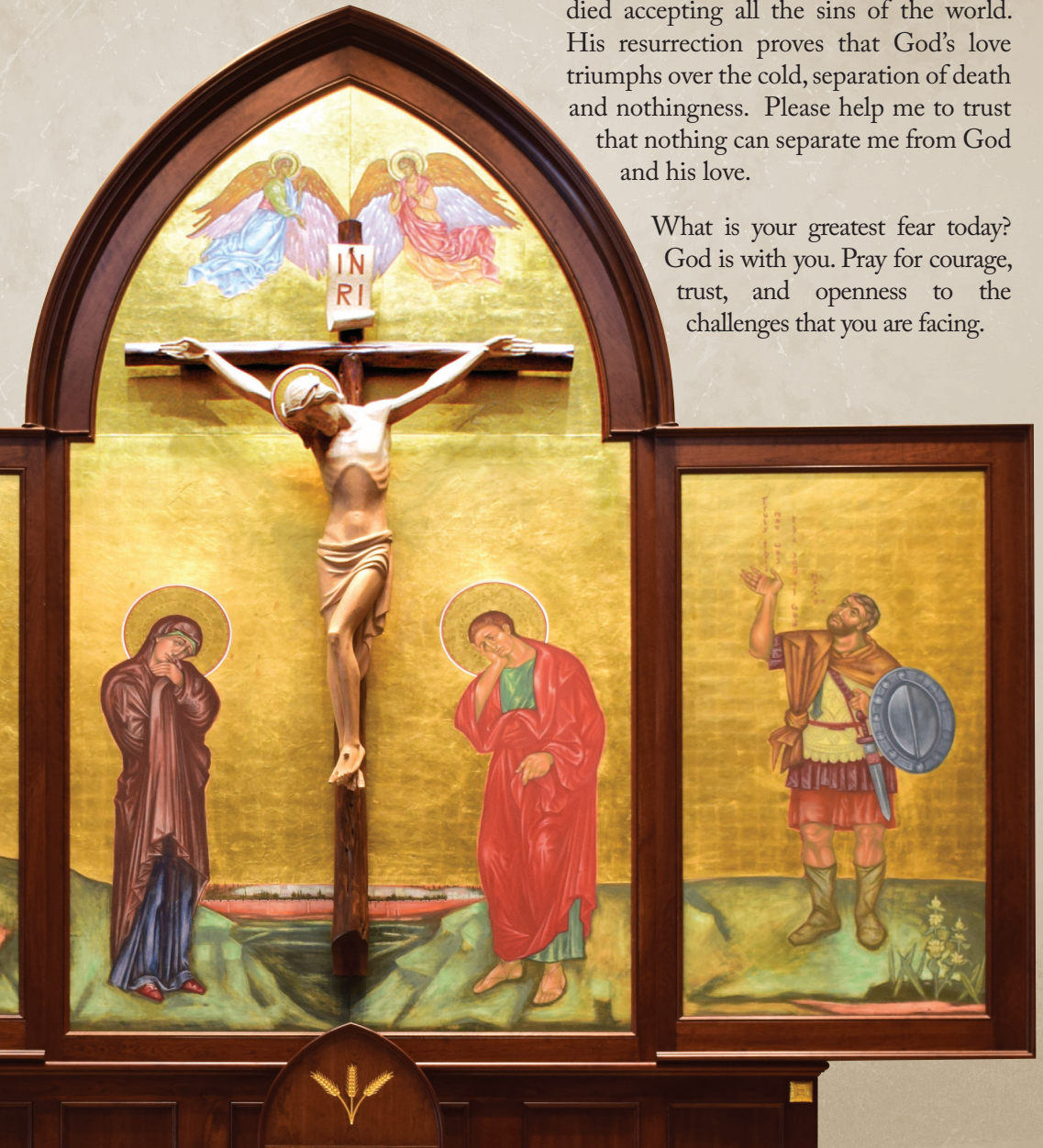


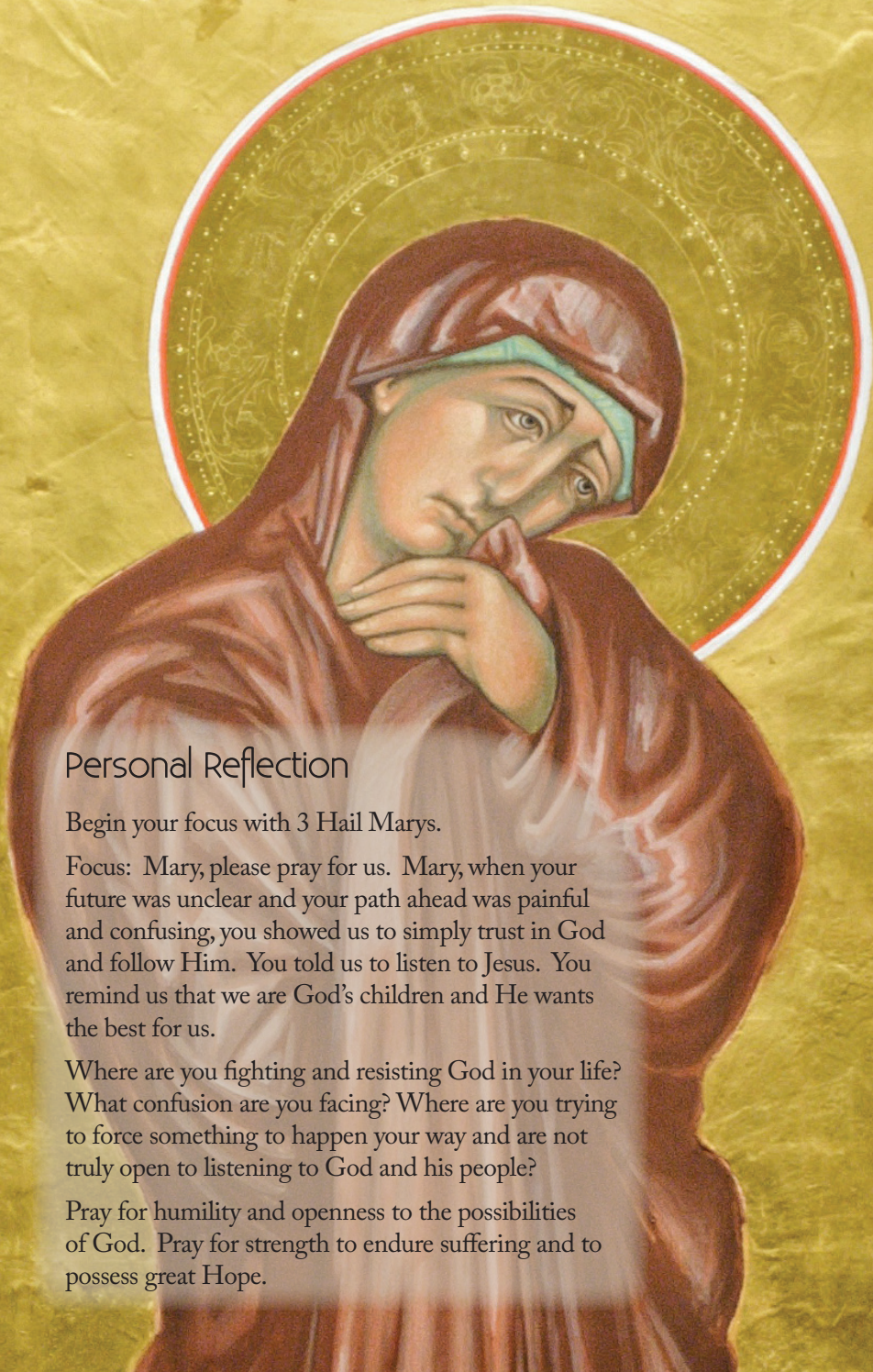
Personal Reflection

Begin your prayer focus with an Our Father, Hail Mary, and The Glory Be.

Focus: My God, your Love is greater than all things including death. My Lord Jesus died accepting all the sins of the world. His resurrection proves that God's love triumphs over the cold, separation of death and nothingness. Please help me to trust that nothing can separate me from God and his love.

What is your greatest fear today? God is with you. Pray for courage, trust, and openness to the challenges that you are facing.





Personal Reflection

Begin your focus with 3 Hail Marys.

Focus: Mary, please pray for us. Mary, when your future was unclear and your path ahead was painful and confusing, you showed us to simply trust in God and follow Him. You told us to listen to Jesus. You remind us that we are God's children and He wants the best for us.

Where are you fighting and resisting God in your life? What confusion are you facing? Where are you trying to force something to happen your way and are not truly open to listening to God and his people?

Pray for humility and openness to the possibilities of God. Pray for strength to endure suffering and to possess great Hope.

Mary

Look deeply at Our Mother in the Icon. Mary is both torn and unshaken. Mary's garment looks almost violently rent. Her pain and anguish as a mother seeing her Son suffer the most ignoble torture and

and in her body. In that embrace is also the fresh memory of the Archangel Gabriel's words at the Annunciation: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have
found favor with God. Luke 1:30

death, is poignant and real, but it does not shake the inner core of her being. The expression of her face shows the deep stillness of her heart. She is profoundly contemplative, as the Scripture tells us she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." Her arms are bent in a cradling gesture, the memory of the baby Jesus, now dying on the cross, still fresh in her heart

womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary trusts God with all her heart, mind, and body – all her dreams, hopes, and fears.

In this is love: not that we have loved
God, but that he loved us. 1 John 4:10

John

John on the other hand, is empty handed; he has come to mourn a friend. He clenches his garment with one hand, almost gnarled by the effort, and supports his cheek and the weight of his despair with the other. He has come to stand at the foot of the cross, when all the others have fled, because he loves Christ. He does not understand why this must happen. His intense suffering is manifested in the icon by the contortions of his face, gesture, and the more convoluted folds of his garment. Being the

one whom Christ loved best of all his disciples, John leaned his head closest to the heart of Christ and there learned from Him how to love unconditionally, selflessly, with the kind of love the Greeks called 'agape' and we call 'charity'. Having gone through this pain, it is he who, in later life, is granted the deepest understanding of the Paschal mystery: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who

does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." (1 John 4:7-21)



Personal Reflection

Focus: John steps forward and cares for Jesus and others, even as he mourns, suffers, and is scared about the future. John is publicly exposed, but his focus is on caring for Mary and Jesus.

Who do you know that is struggling today? Have you been sensitive to their needs for loving help? Who in your life immediately comes to mind? Pray for them.

Resolve to help them in some way.

Have you been consumed internally and missed moments to serve others. Are you afraid to step out and help someone in need? Pray for a resolve to serve others and to gain a sensitivity to their needs.

The Witnesses

The other witnesses to this event are the three women and the centurion Longinus. They are supporting characters in this passion play, no less important for their secondary role.

Personal Reflection

Begin your focus with an Our Father.

These faithful women are steadfast in their support of each other. Their wisdom is freshly aware that evil is real. They know suffering and pain. They see Satan lure and distract others to destroy relationships with God. But they also have experienced Jesus' great power and forgiving love. It warms them deeply from within. God reigns, even as the evil one lashes out at each of us. These women come together for strength and comfort.

Do you share your faith? Are you proud to follow Jesus? Is it evident in your life? Are you available to support others? Are you active in God's family, the Church? The world suffers great injustice – are you sensitive to great suffering? Are you involved in bringing justice and comforting those in need?

The Three Women

The three women are represented in a compact group, like three columns held together by their intertwining arms. On the left is Mary Magdalene, the youngest of the three, who loved much and was forgiven much, the one whose love for Christ was comparable only to John's. She is the youngest among the disciples. In the middle is Salome, wife of the rich fisherman Zebedee, and also the mother of John and James. Jesus called the brothers the Sons of Thunder. On the right is Mary, wife of Clopas and sister of the Virgin Mary. Being, as women are wont



Left to Right – Mary Magdalene, Salome (Mother of John and James), Mary (Virgin Mary's sister)

to be by their nature and vocation, intimate with the evils of this world and the great mysteries of life, death and suffering, their reaction is one of quiet, unassuming grief. They comfort one another and share the burden

of their pain. However, their stance is not hopeless nor despairing but contemplative. They understand that love is suffering; that is the way of the world.

The Centurion

The centurion Longinus, who wielded the long spear against the defenseless side of Christ, is a soldier. He is a man of action, used to the hardships of the battlefield, ready to give his life, and trained to take another's without remorse. In the service of a tremendous secular power, his manhood is corrupted by sin. Yet, in his encounter with Christ, while others are casting lots for His garments, he is transformed. He turns from 'killer' to 'warrior', thus recapturing the true essence of his masculinity:

protector and fighter for the honor of God. He is represented as a strong, rugged, 'manly' man, dressed in full military garb. This image is ennobled by the gentle, contemplative expression of his face and the limpid eyes who have been granted

spiritual sight. Longinus is the first among Gentiles to recognize the divinity of Christ. St. Longinus exclaims: "Truly this man was the Son of God". He lifts up these words from Mark 15:34 toward heaven with his upraised hand.



Truly this man was the Son of God.

Mark 15:34

Personal Reflection

Begin your focus by saying the Glory Be three times

Focus: This warrior understands he has allowed his secular leaders to corrupt his God-given capabilities and talents. He reclaims them for their rightful purpose for serving God.

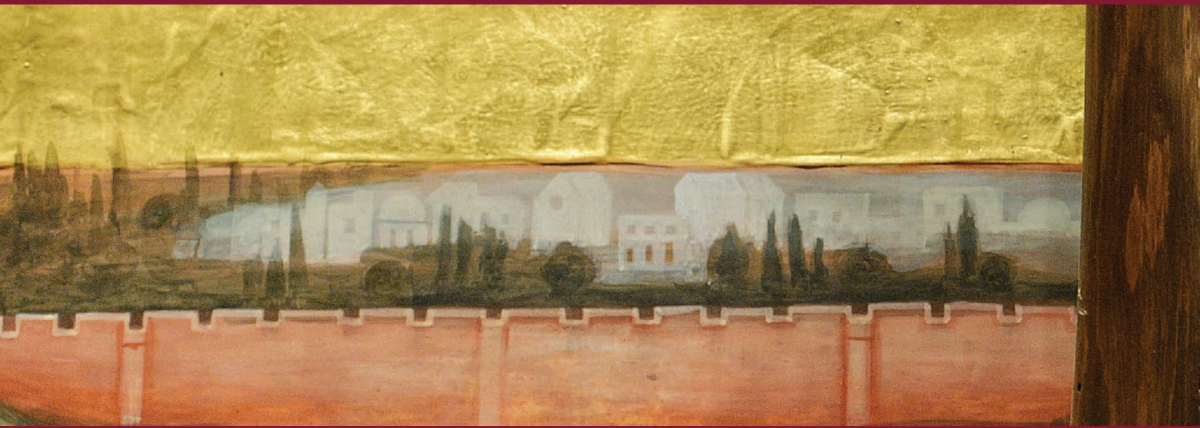
Oh Lord, each day we are surrounded by politics and culture wars. Our social circles, families, and workplace put pressures on our motivations. We struggle with decisions that impact our reputation, influence, opportunities, and loved ones. Holy Spirit, give us clear sight, passion, and confidence to follow you. All we have comes from the Father. Help us to develop and use our God-given capabilities for His people and purposes.

What great decisions are you making about how you will use your talents and gifts, and who you allow to influence you? Invite God into your decision reflections. Are you developing your capabilities for selfish intentions or to help serve God's Family?

The Landscape

The landscape surrounding the scene is a barren, cragged terrain reflecting the place where Christ was crucified: Golgotha or the Place of the Skull. However, this almost hopeless expanse, on which the figures are precariously perched and

which threatens to engulf them, sweeps back and widens toward the rose horizon - the wall of the city -, and a burst of white light around the foot of the cross - the renewed Jerusalem.



Personal Reflection

Begin your focus with a Hail Mary.

Focus: Sometimes it feels like nothing is going right and the walls are collapsing all around. The atmosphere is suffocating and bleak. Jesus understands. He loves you. He is with you. He feels your suffering and will help you.

What chronic struggles do you have where you see no hope for change? Is it a hurtful relationship, a painful health or mental condition, a difficult work or family situation? Are you disappointed with where you are in life? Do you

experience long spiritual emptiness?

Prayer: Oh God, I am lost. Help me to move through this struggle. I give it all to you and place the next steps in your hands. I trust that you want the best for me and everyone else. Oh Lord, help me to see new signs of hope and life. Make me sensitive to know how and when to participate in what you make new. I will keep praying and wait eagerly for Your Spirit to move.



The Jerusalem sage, which only grows in dark, dank places, is depicted growing out of a crack in the rock at the foot of the centurion, another sign of hope. It reminds us of the tomb and the resurrection.





The Light of God and Angels

The gilded portion occupies more than three quarters of the background. Gold represents the uncreated light of God. The angels at the top of the cross and the centurion's raised hand, move the scene from death and suffering, into the light of the eternal sacrifice and our redemption as adopted

sons and daughters of God. They point toward heaven, but also, following the gaze of Christ, back toward earth, toward the tabernacle, where lies, enshrined in glory, the object of our love, and the promise of our salvation: the Holy Eucharist.



Personal Reflection

Begin your focus with an Our Father.

Prayer: Oh Lord, you love us so totally, that you desire to literally and fully be united as one with us. You unite our mind with Your Holy Word, You unite our spirit with Your Holy Spirit, and you unite our physical body with your body through the Eucharist, the true Body of Your Son, Jesus, the Christ. You elevate our very bodies as a holy place blessed by your indwelling presence.

Oh God, Help me to Love others as you Love. Help me to spend time with you each day. Thank you for your Loving sacrifice and eternal forgiveness.



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