

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS MARY AND JOSEPH



REFLECTION FOR THE FEAST

The Feast of the Holy Family is experienced by many as slightly intimidating. When the whole Church contemplates the domestic life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the shortcomings of our own family life are highlighted. Especially with the rise of marital breakdown and the decline in religious practice, the Holy Family can appear very distant indeed from our – perhaps painfully ‘unholy’ – families.

Just look at today’s First Reading and compare your own family life, and the families you know. Are fathers honored by their children? Do mothers have their authority respected? Are parents gladdened and comforted by their children? Is the presence of the elderly warmly welcomed?

And how about the virtues listed in the second reading, virtues which doubtless characterized the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph: can we really say that our families are characterized by patience, forgiveness, humility, gentleness, obedience, mutual submission?

If we treat this feast only as an examination of conscience, we might end up simply feeling inadequate. But a proper understanding of our baptism shows that this feast contains a consolation and a promise that lifts us out of our despair. Think about it: we have each been baptized into Christ. We are living members of Christ’s body. By our baptism we have been “called into one body”, not a generic body politic, but precisely the body of Christ.

This has immense consequences: it means that, to the extent that we are joined to Christ by faith and love and the sacraments everything He did and suffered counts, mystically, as our very own. His works are our works. This is how the Cross, for example, becomes a saving mystery for me. But it is also true of the humbler mysteries of Christ’s life, including His domestic life. This means that, far from being a distant reality, the Holy Family is, in so far as we belong to Christ, our family. If we are one with Christ, then we were there in the manger in Bethlehem, surrounded by the love of Mary and Joseph. Mary held us and nourished us. We were taken to the Temple to be presented. Joseph took us up in his strong arms and brought us to Egypt, to keep us safe.

If we are one with Christ, Mary is our mother, and Joseph our guardian. It's because the Church is the Body of Christ that we can rightly call Mary the 'Mother of the Church', and St. Joseph its Patron and Protector.

All this shows today's feast in a different, warmer light. The home of the Holy Family in Nazareth is not a distant model of unattainable domestic bliss. It's our spiritual home, a place where we belong, where we are loved, and kept safe. Far from being a zone of intimidating perfection which makes us want to flee, Nazareth is precisely where we should go, in spirit, if we feel our family life is inadequately holy: it is there, in union with Christ, cared for by Joseph and Mary, that we are transformed by grace and made ready to love more generously and to live more abundantly.

STEWARDSHIP: Joseph's obedience to God was not a one-time thing. His attention to the angel's warning kept Jesus from being murdered by Herod and led to the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be a Nazorean. Fidelity to God's will assures the best use of my talents, too!



READINGS THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD 1 JAN '20

Nm. 6:22-27: The Lord blesses the children of Israel with peace.

Gal. 4:4-7: God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to make us His children.

Lk. 2:16-21: Mary treasures all the things that happen at the birth of Jesus and ponders them in her heart.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

"Mary, the all-holy ever-virgin Mother of God, is the masterwork of the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time. For the first time in the plan of salvation and because His Spirit had prepared her, the Father found the dwelling place where His Son and His Spirit could dwell among men. In this sense the Church's Tradition has often read the most beautiful texts on wisdom in relation to Mary. Mary is acclaimed and represented in the liturgy as the "Seat of Wisdom." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 721)

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God is a liturgical celebration observed on January 1st. It is a holy day of obligation for Catholics, meaning that Mass attendance is required (though the Mass obligation is sometimes waived by the bishop for various reasons.)

The use of the word "Solemnity" here is a designation used for certain days within the liturgical (church-based) calendar of the Church. Solemnities are the highest rank of liturgical celebration, higher than feast days or memorials. By celebrating a solemnity dedicated to Mary's motherhood, the Church highlights the significance of her part in the life of Jesus, and emphasizes that He is both human and divine.

Jesus' nature as both and equally human and divine is something we may take for granted today. But back in the early days of the church, this dogma of our faith was hotly debated. In 431 A.D. during the Council of Ephesus, the title of "Mary Mother of God," in Greek "Theotokus," was defended and defined against the heresy of Nestorius. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, refuted the title of "Theotokus" claiming that Christ had two loosely united natures, and therefore, Mary was only the mother of the human part of Him.

Catholic theologians rejected this claim, and defined that Christ indeed has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature definitely united in one divine person, and since Christ's two natures form one single person, Mary is the mother of the whole Person of Christ.

Therefore, Mary can be properly called "Mother of God," not in the sense that she came before God or is the source of God, but in the sense that the Person that she bore in her womb is indeed true God and true man.

The Solemnity of Mary Mother of God falls exactly one week after Christmas, the end of the octave of Christmas. It is fitting to honor Mary as Mother of Jesus, following the birth of Christ. When Catholics celebrate the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God we are not only honoring Mary, who was chosen among all women throughout history to bear God incarnate, but we are also honoring our Lord, who is fully God and fully human.

Calling Mary "mother of God" is the highest honor we can give Mary. Just as Christmas honors Jesus as the "Prince of Peace," the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God honors Mary as the "Queen of Peace."

Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (1974), called the Solemnity of Mary "a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace."

READINGS THE SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD 5 JAN '20

Is. 60:1-6: The light of the Lord's glory shines out and draws people from all over the world: they come to worship and to praise the Lord.

Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6: The writer tells how the non-Jewish nations now share in the same inheritance and promise as the chosen people, through Christ Jesus

Mt. 2:1-12: The magi, who represent the Gentile nations, come to Jerusalem as they search for the recently born king of the Jews; they are sent on to Bethlehem, the city of King David.

PAPAL INTENTION FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

That Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of goodwill may promote peace and justice in the world.

CATHOLIC CELEBRATION OF A NEW YEAR

We are beginning the Year of the Lord 2020. The marking of the dawn of a new year is no secular holiday, because time and history have been drawn into the coming of God into the world. We keep track of our time as either BC (Before Christ) or AD (Anno Domini, In the Year of the Lord) to demonstrate that Christ is the center of history, the one through whom we judge all that came before and is going to come.

In the ancient world, the spring equinox marked the beginning of a new year. Spring serving as this turning point makes natural sense, as it marks the renewal of the cycle of the seasons as new life springs forth from the formerly barren soil. Why start the new year in the dead of winter? Julius Caesar changed Rome's calendar from a lunar to a solar year, and moved the start of the year from March to January (a new month dedicated to the god of entryways, Janus). The marking of the New Year brought pagan observances and excessive celebrations, so much so that early Christians observed expiatory fasts in reparation (which some Catholics have now renewed).

In the Middle Ages, there was great variance on the celebration of the New Year: March 1, March 25 (Annunciation), September 1, and even Christmas Day. It was the adoption of the Gregorian calendar that eventually brought uniformity to the date of January 1. That day makes perfect sense for Catholics, even if we are fighting a resurgence of pagan excess surrounding the date. That New Year coincides with the Octave of Christmas is no coincidence. If we count our years from the birth of Christ, Christmas should be the time to mark the beginning of the new year.

Celebrating the new year specifically as the anniversary of the birth of Christ transforms its character. Not only does it point to God's coming into the world as the central point of history, it also emphasizes that history has a goal. The new year marks the new year of the Lord, belonging to the reign of Christ the King, a period of waiting in expectation for the full unfolding of God's Kingdom. History itself has the same focal point as Christmas, the coming of Christ into the world, which is why Advent focuses on both of these comings at once.

The celebration of the New Year in January, and in relation to a historical feast, breaks time out of a natural, repetitive cycle. History is not cyclical, or merely an absurdity devoid of meaning (one damn thing after another). We are progressively moving toward a goal from within history, even though this goal leads beyond the world to eternity. It is the coming of God into the world at Christmas which suffuses time with its ultimate meaning.

In his essay "The Christian View of History," Christopher Dawson argues that the Incarnation brings about "a new creation—the introduction of a new spiritual principle which gradually leavens and transforms human nature into something new. The history of the human race hinges on this unique divine event which gives spiritual unity to the whole historical process."

History makes sense in the Incarnation, as all things before prepare for it, and all things that follow are seen in light of its unfolding (even the challenges to that unfolding).

The modern world has arisen largely in opposition to this understanding of history. The Enlightenment saw God as a threat to human freedom, and the fulfillment of ultimate goals in the *eschaton* (the final event in God's plan, His reign at the end of time) as a cheapening of history's significance. Modern thinkers and revolutionaries have replaced Christian hope in eternal life with an immanent religion of progress. It is important, however, to recognize that this is no reversion to a pre-Christian paganism, but rather the creation of a Christian heresy, which accepts history's progressive nature. This heresy deforms Christian faith in God's providence into faith in the power of technology to create a more perfect life here and now. And as we are seeing, with no clear goal to guide technological development, change for its sake exerts a destructive power.

No one has diagnosed the heresy of modern progress better than Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*. Speaking of the revolution of thought beginning with Bacon, Benedict laid out the program for modern progress as seeking redemption and paradise without God: [A] disturbing step has been taken: up to that time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from Paradise was expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay "redemption." Now, this "redemption", the restoration of the lost "Paradise" is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level—that of purely private and other-worldly affairs—and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world. This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope. Thus hope too, in Bacon, acquires a new form. Now it is called: *faith in progress*.

In Benedict's view, our understanding of time relates directly to our concept of hope. Christmas is a time of hope, because God has come to us and has inaugurated the Kingdom of God. If the new year simply reflects a chronological addition, history flattens in its significance, and we are left without any true joy or reason to celebrate. Celebration becomes distraction.

If New Year's focuses on the Kingdom of God, does this concede to the modern revolutionary? Does Christmas sap the marrow out of the world by placing our hope beyond it? *Gaudium et Spes* responds to this common assertion by teaching that no tension should exist between earthly progress and the Christian focus on eternity:

Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the importance of their obligation to work with all men in the building of a more human world. Indeed, the mystery of the Christian faith furnishes them with an excellent stimulant and aid to fulfill this duty more courageously and especially to uncover the full meaning of this activity, one which gives to human culture its eminent place in the integral vocation of man.

The Christian vocation, following on the principle of the Incarnation, seeks precisely to bring God to the world, to embody faith within it in order to transform it. It is the vocation of the

laity, in particular, to permeate all of human activity with the life of the Church, not to stifle it, but to bring it to a greater perfection in Christ.

How then does this relate to the Catholic celebration of New Year's Day? The answer is that *dates do matter* and that the marking of these dates defines how we understand our place within history and God's plan. New Year's should reinforce our sense of vocation for the coming year.

As we mark the year 2020, it helps to think back to Pope St. John Paul II's celebration of the new millennium. John Paul recognized that the marking of 2,000 years from the birth of Christ represented a significant milestone in the life of the Church, a time for Christians to rediscover their vocation in the world. The document, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, in particular, provides a powerful reflection on the Incarnation, a Christian understanding of time, and the way we mark it in our own lives.

With regard to its *content*, *this Great Jubilee* will be, in a certain sense, like any other. But at the same time it will be different, greater than any other. For the Church respects the measurements of time: hours, days, years, centuries. She thus goes forward with every individual, helping everyone to realize how *each of these measurements of time is imbued with the presence of God* and with His saving activity.

New Year's teaches us how properly to measure time, how to mark the coming of salvation into the world in light of its progressive unfolding in our lives and in human history. John Paul, quoting St. Paul, tells us further that "from this relationship of God with time there arises *the duty to sanctify time.*" We mark the progression of time as an opportunity to reflect on our own lives in relation to it. Where do we stand within God's plan for history? How can I immerse my own life into God's coming into the world? How can I allow God to shape my own life in time, and, through me, to shape history?

Just like the Great Jubilee that John Paul observed, we have another opportunity not only to celebrate a new year, but an Extraordinary Jubilee Year. John Paul taught that "the Jubilee, 'a year of the Lord's favor,' characterizes all the activity of Jesus; it is not merely the recurrence of an anniversary in time." Anniversaries are not mere numbers, but a way of making present what we celebrate. This New Year's Day let us celebrate God's transformation of history by His coming into the world and then let this celebration continue to mark our observance of this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

SAINTS OF THE WEEK 2 JANUARY

BASIL the GREAT (d. 379) GREGORY NAZIANZUS the YOUNGER (330-389)

St. Basil, Doctor of the Church. He was born in Caesarea, Cappadocia, one of ten children of St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia. His grandmother was St. Macrina the Elder. While studying in Constantinople and Athens, Basil was a classmate of St. Gregory Nazianzus and Emperor Julian the Apostate (r. 362-363). Baptized, Basil toured Palestine, Syria, and Egypt and established a hermitage on the Iris River in Pontus (southern Black Sea area). He was ordained in 363 in Caesarea and returned to Pontus. St. Gregory Nazianzus asked him to return to Caesarea in 365, and Basil became archbishop there in 370. Emperor Valens (r. 364-378), an Arian heretic, persecuted Basil, but he continued his opposition to the sect.

He was responsible for the victory of the Nicene Creed, and when the Council of Constantinople was convened in 381, he set in motion the condemnation of Arianism. A man of great personal holiness, his works demonstrate his scholarly ability and deep spirituality. Among his writings are *On the Holy Spirit*, three books against Eunomius, and passages from Origen, a work he compiled with St. Gregory Nazianzus.

Emperor Valens died in 378, and Emperor Gratian (r. 367-383) helped put an end to the spread of Arianism. Basil died soon after, on January 1, 379, and was buried in Caesarea. He is patron of the Order of St. Basil, a Doctor of the Church in the West, and a Holy Hierarch in the East.

St. Gregory Patriarch and Doctor of the Church, called "the Divine" and the Younger. The son of Gregory Nazianzus the Elder and St. Nonna, Gregory studied law in Athens, joining his friend St. Basil in a hermitage. He returned to Nazianzus, Cappadocia (modern Turkey) to assist his father the local bishop, and was ordained against his will in 362. He was named the bishop of Sasima in 372, but he remained at Nazianzus as his father's coadjutor. In 375, Gregory suffered a breakdown from overwork and went to Seleucia (near modern Baghdad), where he spent the next five years in prayer and study. Asked to go to Constantinople and to become patriarch in 380, he zealously fought the Arian and Apollinarist heretics, triumphing when Emperor Theodosius II (r. 394-395) exiled the heretic leaders. Gregory presided over the Council of Constantinople in 381, where his election as patriarch was challenged. He resigned from that office and retired to private life at Nazianzus. He died on January 35. Called "the Theologian," Gregory is ranked with Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa as one of the Cappadocian Fathers. While shy in temperament, he was nevertheless an eloquent speaker and was noted for his sermons on the Trinity, his "Five Theological Orations," the *Philocalia* (containing excerpts from Origen), and a poem, *De Vita Sua*.

PRAYERS

A Prayer for the Family

Jesus, our most loving redeemer, You came to enlighten the world with your teaching and example. You willed to spend the greater part of Your life in humble obedience to Mary and Joseph in the poor home of Nazareth. In this way, You sanctified that family, which was to be an example for all Christian families.

Graciously accept our family, which we dedicate and consecrate to You this day. Be pleased to protect, guard, and keep it in holy fear, in peace, and in the harmony of Christian charity. By conforming ourselves to the Divine model of Your family, may we attain to eternal happiness.

A Prayer to The Holy Family, for Patience

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, like you we are members of the Father's family. We pray that our family love may reflect his love on its openness to all people. May we forgive even when not forgiven, and be patient with others' weaknesses.

Jesus, give us peace, unit and strength to meet the difficulties of daily living. May we use our family resources to improve the quality of life for ourselves and all people. Let us show joy in serving, for whatever we do for others, we do for you.

Mary, inspire us, that our love may be strong but not possessive. Let our willingness to give depend on the needs of others rather than on the cost of giving.

Joseph, help us to be attentive to the Father's will. Let us be ready, as you were, to act whenever he calls us.

A Prayer for a Child's Return to the Faith

Dear Lord, You became Man, suffered, and died to win salvation for all souls. Look graciously on the soul of my child who has drifted away from You and the Faith. Grant him/her your grace to see the error of his/her ways and return to the fold of Your care.

Teach me to stay close to him/her during this trying time and strive to convert him/her by action and prayers more than by words that I may antagonize. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust You to do everything to bring my child back to You.

A Family's New Year Prayer

God, thank you for a new year. May everyone in our family be willing to begin anew with a clean slate. We know that you are always ready to forgive us. Help us to be willing to forgive ourselves and to forgive one another.

As we begin a new year, remind us of our truest values and our deepest desires. Help us to live in the goodness that comes from doing what you want us to do. Help us to put aside anxiety about the future and the past, so that we might live in peace with you now, one day at a time.

The Year Ahead

May God make your year a happy one!
Not by shielding us from all sorrows and pain,
But by strengthening us to bear it, as it comes;
Not by making our path easy,
But by making us sturdy to travel any path;
Not by taking hardships from us,
But by taking fear from our heart;
Not by granting us unbroken sunshine,
But by keeping our face bright, even in the shadows;
Not by making our life always pleasant,
But by showing us when people and their causes need us most,
and by making us anxious to be there to help.
God's love, peace, hope and joy to us for the year ahead.

SCHEDULE FOR COMING WEEK

Monday & Tuesday 8:30 a.m. Mass

Solemnity of Mary Mother of God (Holy Day of Obligation) 31 Dec-1 Jan

31 Dec. Tuesday Vigil Mass 5:00 p.m.

1 Jan. Wednesday 10:00 Mass

1 Jan. Wednesday Visitation & Wake Service John Gray Sr. 6-9 p.m.

Thursday 2 Jan 8:30 a.m. Mass

10:00 a.m. Visitation 11:00 a.m. Funeral Mass John Gray Sr.

Friday 3 Jan First Friday Mass 8:30 a.m. Confession 5:00 p.m. Mass & Benediction 7:00 p.m.
Saturday 4 Jan 8:30 a.m. Mass

“The future starts today, not tomorrow.”

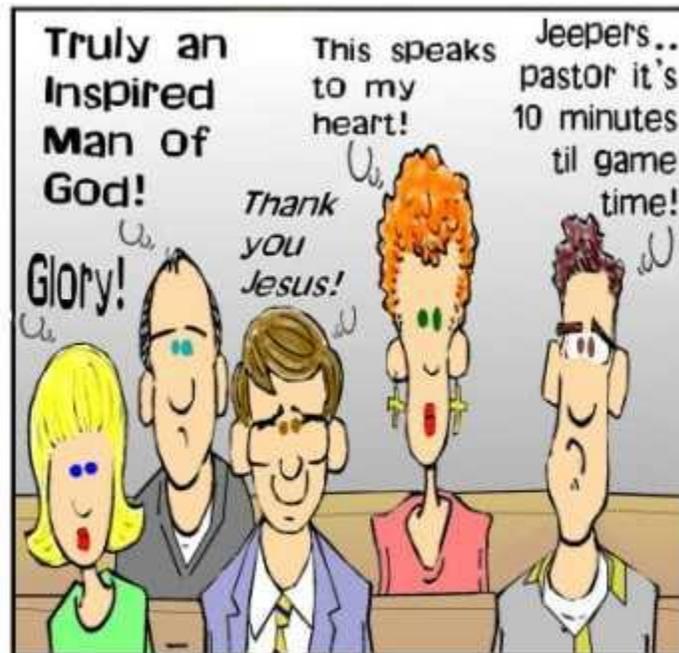
Karol Wojtyla

“Life is an opportunity, benefit from it. Life is beauty, admire it. Life is a dream, realize it.”

Mother Teresa

“You have been chosen. Therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.”

J. R. R. Tolkien



Pastor Johnson is a gifted speaker reaching each member of his congregation in a way that made you feel each sermon was just for you.