



FEAST REFLECTION

True joy comes from a profound harmony between persons, something which we all feel in our hearts and which makes us experience the beauty of togetherness, of mutual support along life's journey. But the basis of this feeling of deep joy is the presence of God, the presence of God in the family and His love, which is welcoming, merciful, and respectful towards all. And above all, a love which is patient: and respectful towards all. And above all, a love which is patient: patience is a virtue of God and He teaches us how to cultivate it in family life, how to be patient, and lovingly so, with each other. To be patient among ourselves. A patient love. God alone knows how to create harmony from differences. (Pope Francis, 27 Oct. 2013)

Rabelais

"A child is not a vase to be filled, but a fire to be lit."

STEWARDSHIP: The first reading today provides a challenging blueprint for the good stewardship of our family relationships. How do I measure up?

**READINGS FOR:
SOLEMNITY OF MARY, The MOTHER OF GOD**

Nm. 6:22-27: God blesses His chosen people. We are now His chosen through the birth of Jesus.

Gal. 4:4-7: We have been given the same spirit as Jesus, making us sons and daughters.

Lk. 2:16-21: Mary ponders all that has happened and she looks to the future.

John Henry Cardinal Newman

“I fully grant that devotion towards the blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries; I do not allow that the doctrine concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from the beginning.”

The EPIPHANY of the LORD

Is. 60:1-6: The prophet sees the radiant light of God shining forth and foresees people from all over the world paying homage with their precious gifts.

Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6: Paul has grasped the fact that in Christ Jesus we all share the inheritance of God’s promises

Mt. 2:1-12: The wise men represent us all, and their symbolic gifts enable Matthew to explain this manifestation of God: Christ is priest, prophet and king.

William Blake

“To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour.”

The Holy Family

The **Holy Family** consists of the [Child Jesus](#), the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. Veneration of the Holy Family was formally begun in the 17th century by St. Francois de Laval, the first bishop of [New France](#), who founded a Confraternity.

The Feast of the Holy Family is a liturgical celebration in the Catholic Church in honor of Jesus, his mother, and his legal father, Saint Joseph, as a family. The primary purpose of this feast is to present the Holy Family as a model for Christian families.^[1] Since the 1969 revision of the General Roman Calendar, the feast is celebrated on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, that is, the Sunday between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day (both exclusive), or if both Christmas Day and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God are Sundays, on 30 December (always a Friday in such years).



SOLEMNITY OF MARY THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

On the 1st of Jan., while much of the world marks the new beginning of the calendar year, the Church commemorates the great solemnity of the Mother of God.

What does this mean?

That the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God means that the child—conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, carried in her body for nine months, and born into this world—is God. As such, this celebration highlights the pivotal truth of the Church's Faith: that God has, in Jesus Christ, accepted a human nature, chosen to be born into this world as we have all been born into this world, and has lived a real, human life.

In doing so, God has accepted the full implication of what it means to be human, including the experiences of suffering and death.

"Why" God did this is what the Scriptures are all about—from start to finish, from Genesis to Revelation. In fact, the Bible is not just some kind of spiritual "self-help" book or just a collection of ancient literature; the Bible is the story of why God accepts a human nature in Christ.

Integral to the "why" of God living, like us, a real, human life is the story of a particular people: the people of Israel. God chooses Israel centuries before He reveals Himself in Christ and invites them to prepare themselves to be the means by which He would reveal Himself to the world in an extraordinary way. Israel, throughout the long ages of its history, glimpses what God will do (that He will become a man), but when this revelation finally happens, the people of Israel are taken by surprise.

The significance of Israel is highlighted today in the testimony of the Gospel of Luke that insists that the child Jesus is circumcised. Remember, circumcision was the sign that Israel had been set apart from other peoples and nations for a particular purpose. In Christ, that purpose is revealed: Israel is the means by which God will reveal Himself in the world. And the means by which God does this is by becoming an Israelite Himself: being born into an Israelite family, learning its culture and customs, speaking its language, and living its unique way of life.

God's relationship with Israel is as such that it can be likened to a mark as permanent, and at times as painful, as that of circumcision. This is seen in all its terrifying intensity in the Cross. Why Israel? This decision on God's part is mysterious.

The "how" of God accepting a human nature is an absolute mystery. It is a revelation that, while it can be appreciated and believed, can never be fully explained.

That the Blessed Virgin Mary is called Mother of God is not pious boilerplate, a kind of title by which we honor the woman who is the mother of Jesus Christ.

To testify that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God is simultaneously a statement about her and a statement about Christ. On the one hand, it highlights the identity and mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an identity and mission that is absolutely singular and unique. No one else is or will ever be the Mother of God. No one else knows Christ as God in the manner that the Blessed Virgin Mary did.

God chose her in such a way that He does not choose us. God made the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary something that our lives will never be. There are points of contact between her experience and our own. She is fully and completely human, like we are. She is not divine. Nor does she, as a result of her unique identity and mission, turn into some kind of divine being. She is like us, but there is something so radically different about her identity and mission that while we can love her, we cannot fully understand her. She is a mystery.

So it is with her Divine Son.

When we identify the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, the emphasis is only secondarily on her; it is primarily about Christ. Mary being referred to as the Mother of God tells us that Jesus Christ is God and was always God. Christ did not "turn" into God, and calling Christ God is not just some kind of projection by which we make Jesus of Nazareth someone very important. That Jesus is really and truly is God is a fact. God accepting a human nature in Christ and living a real, human life is not just a story we tell that is all symbol, myth and legend; it is all true and it really happened.

Now, you might be waiting at this point for the "lesson"—a point of contact between the testimony I have given and your experience. We are accustomed to think that preaching must always deliver a lesson, but in this case, if there is a lesson, it is that God will always exceed human expectations and will do so in ways that are absolutely extravagant. What God had done and will do will not fit neatly into our categories of understanding, nor will he be bound by what we think he should do.

What God will deliver to us are mysteries, and it is through these mysteries that we will be able to see and, even in our own limited way, understand who God is and what He asks of us. But even as this happens, what is given to us is not a way of figuring God out. The Incarnation of God in Christ is the singular and privileged way by which God reveals Himself to the world. We see in Christ with the greatest clarity possible who God is and what He is all about.

This clarity of vision is made possible by God because it is in the radiance of His own life and love that He reveals Himself in Christ. What we see in Christ is a mystery. And that is the lesson: God has, in Christ, accepted a human nature and lived a real human life. It is this mysterious revelation that the Church, like Christ's Mother, the Mother of God, contemplates and treasures on this Solemnity of the Virgin Mary, and all the days of the year.

OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Why do we celebrate Masses from Christmas Day through 1 Jan instead of taking a breather and close everything down? Well the short of it is that Christmas is a Season, not simply one day.

While so many of our cultures only celebrate the build-up to Christmas, as a faith community we celebrate Christmas for the next several weeks. And, there is much to celebrate here, much to enter into more deeply. Too often, the days before Christmas are too busy to enter into the meaning of this feast or to reflect on the daily scriptures and the graces that are offered us, in our concrete life circumstances. This first week is a time for us to enter into the stories of special saints who are associated with the Birth of our Lord because of their innocence: our first martyr and the Disciple Jesus loved. Next week, we return to stories of Jesus' life and ministry.

Two Principal Solemnities

There are two principal feasts in the Liturgical Year: Easter and Christmas. These are both solemnities (and holydays of obligation) and in the current Liturgical Calendar are the only feasts that have octaves attached (the 1962 calendar also has an octave of Pentecost). Solemnities are festive and exceptional days, the highest ranked feasts of the liturgical calendar marked with special characteristics:

11. Solemnities are counted as the principal days in the calendar and their observance begins with Evening Prayer I of the preceding day. Some also have their own vigil Mass for use when Mass is celebrated in the evening of the preceding day.

The celebration of Easter and Christmas, the two greatest solemnities, continues for eight days, with each octave governed by its own rules. (General Norms of the Liturgical Calendar)
And according to Canon 1251, if a solemnity falls on a Friday, there is no obligation for abstinence.

What Is an Octave?

An *octave* is the eight-day period during which Easter or Christmas is celebrated, and includes the actual feast. The eighth day is also called the octave or "octave day," and days in between are said to be "within the octave":

Octave means an eight-day celebration, that is, the prolongation of a feast to the eighth day (dies octava) inclusive. The feast itself is considered the first day, and it is followed by six days called "days within the octave." The eighth or octave day is kept with greater solemnity than the "days within the octave" (With Christ Through the Year, Bernard Strasser, 1947, p. 39).

The Easter Octave is from Easter Sunday to the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, each day being another "little Easter." The Easter octave "overrides" any other feasts on the calendar. Christmas also has an octave, but it is very different from Easter, because it is filled with various feast days, but yet each day is still another "little Christmas."

From Christmas Day until January 1st, the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, is the Octave Day of Christmas. The Liturgy gives the clues that every day within the octave is treated the same as the original feast day of the Nativity of our Lord. The Liturgy of the Hours repeats Sunday Week I every day of the octave. The Mass has a special *Communicantes (In communion...)* to insert every day of the Octave when Eucharistic Prayer I is used:

Celebrating the most sacred night (day) on which blessed Mary the Immaculate Virgin brought forth the Savior for this world, and in Communion with those whose memory we venerate, especially The glorious ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ...

Finally, the Gloria is repeated each day of the Octave.

Despite having four days within the octave that are feasts: St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, the Holy Innocents and the Holy Family, each of these days is another “day of the octave of Christmas.”

The main difference between the Easter Octave and the Christmas Octave is that every day in Easter is another solemnity, and Christmas only has two solemnities, December 25, Christmas and January 1, Mary Mother of God. The days in-between are varying levels of feast days.

Why An Octave?

It has often been said that Catholics know how to celebrate. The Church has a built-in pattern within the liturgical calendar that provides what man needs to celebrate the feasts of the year: times of preparation and penance building to major feasts that are prolonged, and multi-level feast days spread throughout the year. Rev. Pius Parsch sums it perfectly when he was writing about the feast of Mary the Mother of God, January 1, the Octave Day of Christmas:

Today is the octave or the eighth day after the feast of Christmas. In the spirit of the Church the great feasts of redemption should not be restricted to a single celebration but should continue on through a full week. Mother Church is good psychologist; she understands human nature perfectly. When a feast comes, the soul is amazed and not quite prepared to think profoundly upon its mystery; but on the following days the mind finds it easy to consider the mystery from all sides, sympathetically and deeply; and an eighth day affords a wonderful opportunity to make a synthesis of all points covered. The octave of Christmas is not the best example because other feasts distract one from the Christmas theme; this octave day, therefore, takes on greater importance. With the feast of the 1st for the last time the Church leads us to the crib at Bethlehem
(The Church's Year of Grace, Volume I, pp. 244-245).

The octave gives us time to impress upon our souls the mysteries, joys and graces of the principal feasts of the Church year.

What's in a Number? Bringing Us Back to “Do”

Why eight days? The number eight is supposed to represent perfection or rest. Some have traced the origins back to Jewish festival customs, such as circumcision of the Jewish boy was on the eighth day, the feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days and concluded with a solemnity, forming an octave, and the feast of the Dedication of the Temple by Solomon and purification lasted eight days. It is also said that Jesus rose from the dead on the eighth day (which is why Sundays are considered on par with solemnities). The development of the octaves within the

liturgy was gradual, and it was not until the 8th century that Rome celebrated octaves for certain feasts.

We are probably most familiar with the term *octave* as it is used in a musical scale. Whether we sing it with solfege, DO RE MI... or play the eight notes within a scale, knowing the musical connection can help understand how the Church views the octave as applied to the Liturgical Year:

Octave (from the Latin octo, eight; octava dies, the eighth day) is used to signify both a period of eight days and the eighth day of that period. This liturgical use conforms to the musical denomination of an octave as the eighth note in a diatonic sequence and also as the whole compass of notes comprised between the first and the eighth (including both extremes) in a diatonic scale. In one sense, then, the octave of Christmas is the feast of the Circumcision, or New Year's Day. In another sense, it is the whole period within these feasts, inclusive of both.

An octave continues the celebration of a feast for eight days. The eighth day, however, whilst of inferior liturgical importance to the feast-day itself, is nevertheless of higher importance than any of the preceding six days. Here, again, there is almost a symbolic correspondence with the musical use of the word; for the eighth note, while not possessing the basic value of the first, still is considered as repeating it, for it merges with the first in physical vibration, sounds like it, and bears its name.

(Catholic Customs and Symbols, Hugh Henry, 1925, p. 203-204).

Hugh Henry wrote the above in 1925, since then the title of the feast for January 1st has changed from the "Circumcision of the Lord" to "Mary, Mother of God," but everything else applies. Octaves in the liturgy mean every day within the octave is the feast all over again. There are subtleties, so it is more of a "little" Christmas rather than the actual solemnity, but technically days in the octave is Christmas all over again.

One question arose in trying to explain this application of music theory to the liturgy. If January 1st is a feast of Mary, how is this repeating the feast of Christmas? First, the actual title of this feast is "the Octave Day of Christmas and the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God." Within this feast is multiple layers, but the title itself indicates it is a feast of our Lord, repeating the solemnity of Christmas, but also honors Mary as the Mother of God. The Mass readings return to the stable at Bethlehem, picking up right after the Gospel from Midnight Mass of Christmas. The shepherds went in haste to the stable...with Mary pondering all these things in her heart, and ends with the Circumcision. The Gospel indicates this is both a feast of Jesus and Mary.

Another explanation supplied by Pope Paul VI from his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultis* from 1974:

5. The Christmas Season is a prolonged commemoration of the divine, virginal and salvific Motherhood of her whose "inviolable virginity brought the Saviour into the world". In fact, on the Solemnity of the Birth of Christ the Church both adores the Savior and venerates His glorious Mother. On the Epiphany, when she celebrates the universal call to salvation, the Church contemplates the Blessed Virgin, the true Seat of Wisdom and true Mother of the King, who presents to the Wise Men for their adoration the Redeemer of all peoples (cf. Mt. 2:11). On the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (the Sunday within the octave of Christmas) the

Church meditates with profound reverence upon the holy life led in the house at Nazareth by Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, Mary his Mother, and Joseph the just man (cf. Mt. 1:19).

In the revised ordering of the Christmas period it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the "holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of Life". It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration to 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.... (Marialis Cultis, St. Pope Paul VI).

While Christmas is considered primarily a feast of our Lord on the liturgical calendar, "the Church both adores the Saviour and venerates His glorious Mother." So today, the Octave Day of Christmas is repeating again this feast of Christmas, honoring both Jesus and Mary.

PRAYERS

Novena for the Epiphany

I salute Thee, O divine Heart, with the three Magi who offered Their homage to Thee. Regard me, I beseech Thee, with the same Love and kindness with which Thou didst receive them, that I May offer with my heart, gold, frankincense and myrrh; that is to Say, my intellect, my memory and my will, in complete Subjection to Thee, in faith, hope, charity, in thought, word and Deed. Accept my offering, accept my heart, and grant that I may Live and die thanking Thee for the invaluable favor of being Called to the true faith. Hence, I beg of Thee, by the joy which Filled Thy heart, when Thou didst see the first of the Gentiles at Thy feet, to hear my prayer and grant the request I make in this Novena. Amen