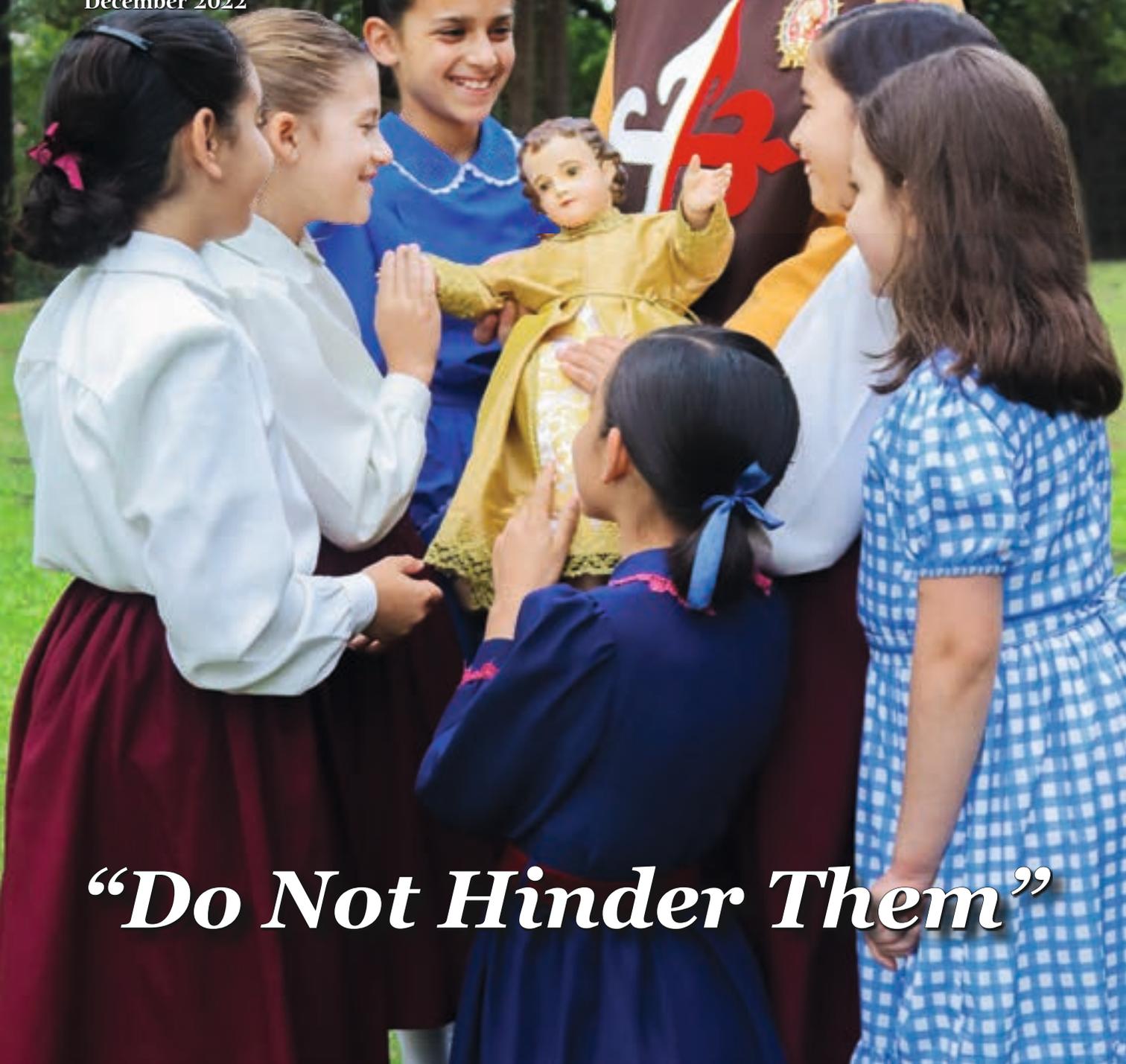




# HERALD OF THE GOSPEL

Vol. 16, No. 182  
December 2022



***“Do Not Hinder Them”***

# Converted by the Blessed Virgin

**“O**n the night of January 19, I woke up with a start and saw before me a huge black cross, of extraordinary appearance and without Christ. I tried to chase away the image, but I could not, even by looking away. I cannot tell how long this lasted. Finally, I fell asleep, and when I woke up I did not think any more of it. [...]

“Had someone said to me that morning, ‘You got up a Jew and you will go to bed a Christian,’ I would have thought him the craziest person in the world. [...]

“I went to a café on the Piazza di Spagna to read the newspapers. [...] On leaving, I saw the carriage of Theodore de Bussières. He stopped and invited me to climb aboard for a drive. I accepted with pleasure. Then he asked me if he could stop for a few minutes at the Church of Sant’Andrea delle Fratte.. [...]

“I entered the church: small, poor and deserted. There I was almost alone. No piece of art attracted my attention. I walked, mechanically, looking around. I remember only a black dog that ran and jumped around my feet. Then the dog disappeared, the whole church disappeared, I no longer saw anything. O my God, I saw only one thing.

“Human words are totally incapable of expressing that which is inexpressible; any description, however sublime, would only be a

profanation of the ineffable truth. I was there prostrate, bathed in my tears, when Monsieur de Bussières recalled me to life. I was unable to reply to his questions. [...] I felt something solemn and sacred in me that made me ask to see a priest. [...] What I had to say could only be said on my knees. [...]

“I had just entered the church when I was suddenly seized with an indescribable emotion; I looked up and found that the rest of the building had disappeared. One single chapel seemed to have gathered all the light and concentrated it. In the midst of this radiance, the Virgin Mary appeared, standing on the altar, a lofty, shining figure, all majesty and sweetness, just as She looks on the [Miraculous] Medal.

Some irresistible force drew me towards Her. The Virgin motioned to me to kneel down and when I did so, She seemed to approve. Though She never said a word, I understood Her perfectly.”

He was baptized on January 31, 1842, in the Church of the Gesù, of the Jesuit Fathers, in Rome.

PEÑA BENITO, OAR, Ángel. Santa Catalina Labouré y la medalla milagrosa. [St. Catherine Labouré and the Miraculous Medal.]

Lima: Libros Católicos, [s.d.], p.45-49



Portrait of Alphonse Ratisbonne

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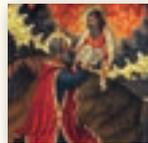
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# OUR READERS WRITE



## UPLIFTING READING ON THE TESTIMONY OF ST. THOMAS

Thank you! It was truly edifying to read the article *Eucharistic Devotion of St. Thomas Aquinas – Living Example of Theology*, which showed me the testimony of this distinguished theologian. I am also grateful for the episodes of his life narrated in a simple way, understandable to all. I trust in his intercession.

I ask the blessing of the priests who read my sincere commentary. Long live Jesus and Mary!

Ivana Zanini  
Via rivista.cattolica.it

## AN ENCHANTING SECTION

The section on the miracles performed through the intercession of Dona Lucilia is what most delights me in *Heralds of the Gospel* magazine. It lets me see and know a little more about this good lady, who attends to the most diverse requests – be they financial, health or family problems – like a truly loving mother who never abandons her children.

Mônica Harumi Furutani Arruda  
Via revista.arautos.org

## THE BEAUTY OF CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

How great and wonderful is our Holy Catholic Church! In her are born the precious flowers of the Saints who, in their diversity, show us the wonders of God's love!

The precious experience of St. Therese, narrated in the article *Letters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus to Her Spiritual "Brothers" – Lessons in Confidence and Wisdom*, makes me relive the enchantment for the beauty of Catholic doctrine. How important it is to take the dogmas of the Faith ser-

iously! The Communion of Saints... St. Therese was very serious and took her faith in this dogma to the peak, offering everything for these two priests entrusted to her, without ever doubting that the spiritual union is much stronger than that of the flesh. Seriousness rewarded by God with sanctity.

Silvia María Manzanares Jugo  
Via revista.cattolica.org

## A MUCH-LOVED AND ADMIRER SAINT

The story of St. Gerard Majella is a beautiful one. Many thanks to the *Heralds of the Gospel* for posting in the online edition the very detailed life of this much-loved and admired Saint.

Álvaro Júnior  
Via revista.arautos.org

## LOVE IS NOT LIBERTINISM

I read the *Gospel Commentary* by Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, entitled *Spirit of Love and Peace*. [As it shows,] confusing love with libertinism is what has made of us a decadent society, leading us into chaos. From Cuenca, we ask God's blessings, awaiting Our Lady's triumph!

Alfredo Fernández de Córdova  
Jerves  
Cuenca – Ecuador

## "HUMILITY, SANCTITY, EUCHARIST"

Choosing one article to comment upon among so many articles in the magazine is like choosing one jewel among so many beautiful ones. In this dilemma, however, there is no doubt that what touches our hearts most these days is the opportunity to participate in the Holy Masses offered daily at the *Heralds of the Gospel* in Joinville. Thus, the article I would like to focus on is: *Humility, Sanctity, Eucharist*. What a beautiful article!

The reason for this choice is that there is nothing in this life that we

desire more than to be before Our Eucharistic Lord Jesus Christ, to be able to participate in Holy Mass, Holy Communion, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the devotions so urgently requested by Our Lady. For us, no other good can compare to this. Nothing makes us happier, more grateful and confident in God's presence than to be able to receive Him into our souls!

Leila Adriana Domingos Vieira  
Joinville – Brazil

## A TRULY CATHOLIC MAGAZINE

*Heralds of the Gospel* magazine is one of the few truly Catholic publications in the world today.

It has shown the entire world the true Church, so persecuted and outraged in our days. Let us know how to listen to the prophetism of our times, so as not to be the "Pharisees of yesterday" who will end up once again committing the sin of deicide!

Cristiano Oliveira Goulart  
Laje do Muriaé – RJ

## "ROSARY, EASY AND SURE MEANS OF SALVATION"

It is wonderful to read texts like this, *The Rosary, Easy and Sure Means of Salvation*, and to ask that everything around us be simplified with faith and devotion to the Rosary.

Adyr Henrique Avila  
Via revista.arautos.org

## A NEW AND FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF THE EUCHARIST

I gained a new and fuller understanding of the Eucharist with the article *The Most Substantial of Banquets*, by Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, commenting on the Gospel of the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

Luiz Augusto Ortelhado Pinheiro  
Via revista.arautos.org

## “FOR TO SUCH BELONGS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN”

**T**he Incarnation of the Word is one of the greatest mysteries of our Faith, even more so when considered in the light of Christmas. In fact, how can the divine infinitude be confined within a child’s body?

There is, however, a profound symbolism in God having become a Child. Firstly, because for the Saviour the little children are a model to be imitated: “Let the children come to Me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 19:14). They are an example of candour, innocence and purity.

However, though He fulfilled all the ancient prophecies and made Himself so accessible to men, the Infant God was rejected by His compatriots. When He was about to be born, the houses of Bethlehem closed their doors to Him (cf. Lk 2:7). And it was not long before Innocence Incarnate was hunted by the despot Herod – supposedly “the Great”, although he was so cowardly. In reality, only his cruelty was great. Unaware of the real whereabouts of the Divine Infant, then exiled in Egypt and without a home, the tyrant ordered the murder of all male children two years old and under. If it is better to die than to scandalize even one of the little ones (cf. Lk 17:2), what can be said of this terrible massacre of innocents?

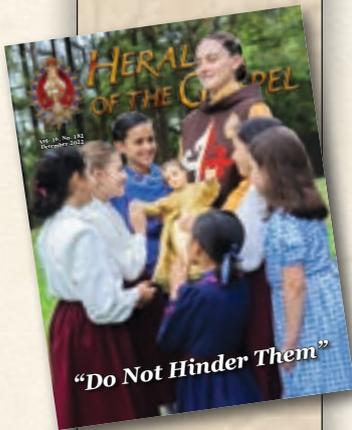
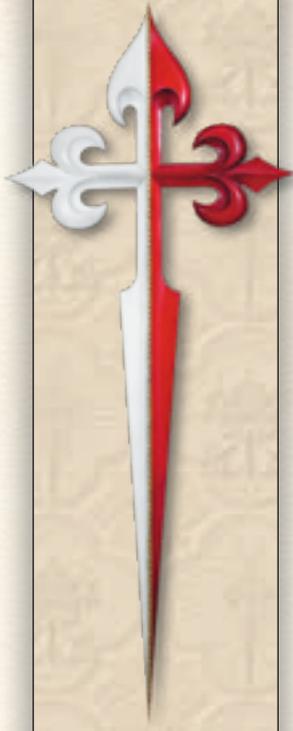
One might object: were they not the protomartyrs of Christ? Indeed, and the Church considers them to be Saints. But if these children had not been torn from their homes and put to death by the sword, would not some of them have become disciples or Apostles of the Lord? What destiny would Providence have confided to them? Ultimately, how many vocations were snatched away at the whim of this infanticidal ruler?

If the death of an innocent man cried out for divine intervention against the evil-doer (cf. Gn 4:10), even more can be conjectured, proportionally speaking, about the fate of those who scandalize or lead the little ones astray from the good path, for, as the Lord proclaimed, those who kill the soul are to be feared more than those who kill the body (cf. Mt 10:28).

Such persecutions of the innocent are sometimes perpetrated by the families themselves, as in the cases of the young Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi and Aloysius Gonzaga. As for the arm of the State, the example of the three little shepherds of Fatima, thrown into prison simply for having contemplated the Most Innocent Virgin, is eloquent. Finally, history is relentless in testifying that even ecclesiastics have persecuted the little ones, such as those who frequented the oratories of St. Philip Neri and St. John Bosco.

In today’s world we are witnessing a true massacre of the innocents, but also, and perhaps even worse, a massacre of innocence, especially through the generalized corruption of customs, fomented by the influence of the mass media, the deterioration of education, and the lack of a solid catechesis of children and young people.

Thus, this Christmas we can only wish that peace may prevail for men of good will (cf. Lk 2:14), so that the Supreme Innocence may reach everyone, especially the little ones, safeguarding them from every kind of massacre. ✧



*Young girls  
venerate the  
Child Jesus*

Photo: María José Feliz



# *The Duty to Cooperate with the Truth*

Christ's words challenge every man with his responsibility to accept or reject the truth, inviting each one, with persuasive force, to remain in the truth.

**O**ur message is inspired by the first page of the Gospel of St. John, in that prologue which is the theme of the sublime poem that sings of the mystery and reality of the most intimate and sacred union between the Word of God and humanity, between Heaven and earth, between the order of nature and that of grace, which shines forth and becomes a spiritual triumph from the beginning of time until its consummation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [...] all things were made through Him [...]. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:1, 3-5). There was a man named John, who came to bear witness to the light. He was not the light, but only a witness who invited people to welcome the light. [...] With this simple and elementary doctrinal and historical evocation comes to us the announcement of Christmas and of Bethlehem.

*“Vidimus gloriam eius”*

These sacred words resound everywhere in a beautiful symphony, instantly diffusing sweetness and beauty,

and then bursting forth in the fullness of that great work which is the three-fold poem of Creation, Redemption – at the price of the Blood of Christ

*The ability to know the truth represents for man the sacred and very grave responsibility to cooperate with the plan of the Redeemer*

– and the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. All this is offered as a treasure of divine doctrine and as a source of perfect life on earth to the souls and peoples who know how to profit from it.

In the first place is the splendour of the Heavenly Father glorified in His Son, who invites us to admire the ineffable relationship between the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. Then the second John, the Evangelist, hastens to tell us of the manifestations of the Trinity in favour of mankind, in favour of the Church, the Mystic-

al Body of Christ, and of every soul: *Vidimus gloriam eius* – We have beheld His glory.

The prologue closes with these words, taking on a tone of glorious acclamation: *Vidimus gloriam eius*. What glory? The most sublime glory of the Word who existed *in principio et ante saecula* and who, in becoming Man, as the only Son of the Father, appeared full of grace and truth. Mark well these two words: grace and truth. [...]

*Jesus invites us to contemplate the truth in Him*

For souls created by God and destined for eternity, it is a natural thing to seek and discover the truth, the primordial object of the interior activity of the human spirit.

Why is the truth said? Because it is God's communication, and between man and truth there is not a merely accidental relationship, but a necessary and essential one. [...]

However, what is most important to retain and understand is that the ability to know the truth represents for man the sacred and very grave responsibility to cooperate with the plan of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Glorifier. This especially concerns Christians who, by virtue of sacra-

mental grace, bear the evident sign that they belong to the family of God. Here we are presented with the highest dignity and responsibility imposed on man – and even more on every Christian – to honour this Son of God, the Word made flesh who gives life both to the composed human being and to the social order.

Jesus offered thirty years of silence for men’s imitation, that they might learn to contemplate in Him the truth; and three years of incessant and persuasive teaching, that they might see in Him an example and a rule of life. [...]

Indeed, Christ’s words confront every man with his responsibility to accept or reject the truth; inviting each one, with persuasive force, to remain in the truth, to nourish his personal thoughts with truth, and to proceed according to the truth.

***We are facing a plot against the Commandments***

These Christmas greetings which we wish to formulate are therefore a solemn invitation to live according to the fourfold duty to contemplate, honour, speak and practise the truth. [...]

In proclaiming these basic demands of human and Christian life, a question arises from the heart and from the lips: Where on earth is respect for truth? Are we not at times, and even too often, faced with a brazen and insolent anti-decalogue which abolishes the “no”, that “you shall not” which precedes the clear and precise formulation of the five Commandments of God’s Law that come after “Honour thy father and thy mother”? In practice, is not life today a rebellion against the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Commandments – “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false



Reproduction

Moses presents the tablets of the Law to the Israelites - National Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Russia)

*Where on earth is respect for truth?  
Are we not at times faced with a brazen and insolent anti-decalogue which abolishes the “no”?*

witness” – as an effective diabolical conspiracy against the truth?

Nevertheless, the Commandment of the Divine Law that Moses heard on the mountain remains always valid and clear: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” (Ex 20:16; Dt 5:20). This Commandment, like the others, remains in force with all its positive and negative consequences: the duty to speak the truth, to be sincere, to be frank, that is, to conform the human spirit to reality; and, conversely, the sad possibility of lying and the even sadder fact of hyp-

ocrisy, of slander, which can obscure the truth. [...]

***Let us turn our gaze to Bethlehem***

Dear children, we come again before the scene of Bethlehem, before the light, the grace and the truth of the Incarnate Word who will draw everyone to himself.

The silence of the Holy Night and the contemplation of that scene of peace are most eloquent. Let us turn to Bethlehem with a pure gaze and an open heart. Alongside this Word of God made Man to save us, alongside this “goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour” (Tm 3:4), [...] let us place our trust in God and in the light that comes from Him. Let us confide in men of good will, joyful that our words will stir in every upright heart a pulsation of manly generosity. ✧

Excerpts from: ST. JOHN XXIII.  
*Christmas Radio Message,*  
22/12/1960 –  
Translation: Heralds of the Gospel



The preaching of St. John the Baptist - Monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla (Spain)

Francisco Lecaros

## ✠ GOSPEL ✠

<sup>1</sup> John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” <sup>3</sup> It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: “A voice of one crying out in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.”

<sup>4</sup> John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were

going out to him <sup>6</sup> and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. <sup>7</sup> When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

<sup>10</sup> Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. <sup>11</sup> I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fan is in His hand. He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:1-12).

# Time for a New Conversion

In inveighing against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, St. John places us within the perspective of the Final Judgement, from which no one can escape. On that day, external appearances will be worthless if we have not produced fruits which demonstrate our conversion.



✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

## I – ADVENT, TIME FOR A REVISION...

When a ship is about to leave the shipyard for its maiden voyage, a christening ceremony is customarily held, in which the new vessel is dubbed. To close the act, a bottle of champagne is broken on the ship's bow, its precious liquid spilling out flamboyantly. Tradition holds that the more foam produced, the better will be the ship's chances of crossing the seas in safety. Finally, freshly painted and gleaming, the ship is launched on its first navigation.

But as the years go by, the ship starts to lose speed, not because its engine has weakened, but because large encrustations of molluscs have adhered to its hull. To allow it to once again cut through the water with ease, it is necessary for it to return to the shipyard to remove the encrustation that is bogging the ship down.

Cars also perform well when new, but after some use they need a tune-up to assure proper mechanical functioning.

The same applies in health matters. From time to time, we go for medical check-ups and visit the dentist to ensure that everything is in order. But the most important examination we need to make is of the soul.

We have to look frequently into our spiritual life, for even though we are baptized, assiduously

receive the Sacraments and practise our Faith seriously, we frequently face circumstances that lead us to commit certain imperfections or become attached to the vanities of this world, and we develop compulsions and bad habits as a result.

We easily fall into thinking that each individual exists only for himself, independent of God and unrelated to others, and that no one sees our thoughts and hidden actions. But in reality, it is only a matter of time before everything will become public.

We can compare our situation with that of someone who keeps a secret document in a safety deposit box. However, by night, he receives a visit from an Angel sent by God, with the order to transmit the secret text to all of humanity...

This is what the Final Judgement will be like: all our thoughts, desires and scheming, as well as our good and bad actions will be known by all, both the blessed and the condemned, without exception – including Angels and devils – as Catholic doctrine teaches.<sup>1</sup>

This is why, in its extraordinary wisdom, the Church distributes the Liturgy over the course of the year to provide us, at set times, the opportunity to carry out a spiritual inspection.

One of these periods is Advent, a time of conversion, a time for examination of conscience,

*Every baptized person needs frequently to take a look into his spiritual life, in order to correct anything that is not in order in his soul*

*The preaching of John the Baptist in the desert of Judea offers us points that can aid us in making a true change in our life this Advent*

penance, and a change of life. The preaching of St. John the Baptist, recorded by St. Matthew in today's Gospel, provides precious material for this.

## II – “REPENT...”!

<sup>1a</sup> John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea...

St. Luke's narration clearly lays out the scene of the Precursor's action; it reports that John “went into all the region about the Jordan” (Lk 3:3).

Because of its closeness to the river, along whose banks lush vegetation grows, this locale is a less harsh portion of the inhospitable and extensive region neighbouring the Dead Sea, known as the desert of Judea. In fact, St. John lived the years preceding his public mission in the solitary northern regions of this desert, where Our Lord would later spend forty days fasting, after being baptized.<sup>2</sup>

Let us consider the words spoken by John the Baptist, seeking to apply them to ourselves.

### *The false hope of the world*

<sup>1b</sup> ...and saying, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

We all receive a seed of God's Kingdom with Baptism, a seed which we must cultivate inter-

iorly through the practice of our Faith, while we await its full possession in eternity.

However, in the modern world, this hope for eternal life is replaced by another, whose object is not God, but rather technology – scientific inventions and discoveries which make human existence more comfortable, and prolong it considerably. The notion has even gained credence that science will yet come up with an elixir with properties that will confer immortality.

Now, technology and medicine can indeed lengthen our lives, but not eternalize them. The time will come when these will fail us, and we will have to depart from this world. Then all earthly hope will come to an end, as the Book of Wisdom teaches: “like chaff carried by the wind, and like a light hoarfrost driven away by a storm; it is dispersed like smoke before the wind, and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays but a day” (Wis 5:14).

Taken in this light, the Precursor's admonishment is very clear and relevant for us: it speaks of doing penance for these deviations, for the Kingdom of Heaven is not for those who place their trust in progress, in machines or in material comfort, but for those who trust in God and have their hope set on eternity.

### *The risk of becoming deaf to God*

<sup>3</sup> It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: “A speech of one cry-

The desert of Judea (Israel)



ing out in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.”

Applied by the four Evangelists to St. John the Baptist, this passage from Isaiah is profoundly symbolic, reminding us of the perennial timeliness of the Precursor’s message. It strikes us that the prophet situates John’s mission “in the wilderness.”

We should interpret this reference as metaphorical rather than strictly physical: John cried out and was heard by those “in the wilderness,” namely, those interiorly detached from all that does not lead to God. When a person is surrounded by the agitation of the “city,” strongly attached to the vanities, machines, and human relationships that draw away from virtue, they are deafened to the voice that speaks of conversion.

At first sight, many of these things may seem legitimate. But those who attach themselves to what is licit and who forget about God, soon fall into illicit attachments. Applying this to ourselves, we can ask: how many disordered affections keep us from hearing the cry of St. John, spoken to us at every moment, through the inner motions of grace in the soul, or through the action of others?

### *Exhortation to a life of integrity*

When people become attached to something illegitimate, they immediately create a doctrine to justify the evil path they have taken.

This is because man is innately logical with regard to the coherence between his conduct and his thinking, as expressed in the incisive phrase of Paul Bourget, cited by Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira in his famed work *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*: “One must live as one



Deirio Lallorenzi

St. John the Baptist -  
Church of Our Lady of Mercy,  
Salta (Argentina)

thinks, under pain of, sooner or later, thinking as one has lived.”<sup>3</sup>

When a person does not desire self-amendment – in other words, to “make his paths straight” – he will in fact end up thinking in accord with his way of life. It is vital, then, to root out rationalizations from our soul, so that we can walk along God’s paths with honesty.

John the Baptist not only called for integrity, but also gave an example of it with his life, which was a model of complete coherence, and with his habits, which were entirely unlike that of the average person, as St. Matthew describes in the following verse.

<sup>4</sup> Now John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

At that time, just as in ours, clothes were not made of camel hair, for this is a coarse material, rough to the touch. St. John’s way of dressing must have caused astonishment. Furthermore, he wore a leather belt around his waist, showing that he was a virgin and practised chastity.

His diet, which consisted of locusts and wild honey, gives us some idea of his life of penance. Owing to our instinctive aversion, most of us would scarcely be able to eat a single one of these insects under duress.

### *St. John rends the veil of false appearances*

<sup>5</sup> At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him <sup>6</sup> and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

What was it that attracted the crowds to the Precursor, to the point that Israelites came from all over Palestine to join him?

*The Precursor not only called for integrity, but also gave an example of it with his life and his habits, which were entirely different from the norm*

*The Pharisees, wishing to give the impression of sharing Public Opinion's enthusiasm for John, also went out to see him*



The preaching of St. John the Baptist - Cathedral of Bayonne (France)

Among other reasons, it was because he was known to speak the truth. And those who accepted his words with good spirit resolved to set out on a new life. To take this step, they confessed their sins and received the “baptism of repentance” (Lk 3:3), which was not the Sacrament later instituted by Our Lord, but a symbolic rite, a type of sacramental that, by means of penance, prepared souls to receive the Saviour.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, John led many “disobedient to the wisdom of the just” (Lk 1:17).

But along with those who converted, there were some who did not want to listen...

<sup>7a</sup> When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers!”

The Pharisees and the Sadducees, whose influence held sway over the entire socio-political scene of that time, were always on the lookout for fluctuations in public opinion, for it was in their

best interests to maintain the support of the grass-roots of society.

Members of both factions saw the enthusiasm that this figure, the Precursor, enkindled among the multitudes who flocked to hear him, as a threat to their power. With an eye to giving the impression that they were joining this wave of religious fervour, they decided to go and see John.

But, judging themselves to be perfect and even sinless, they did not intend to confess their faults, but only to receive baptism as a stamp that would justify them in the public eye.

When the prophet saw them, “he discerned that they had not come in sincerity but rather with feigned and hypocritical posturing, which was entirely in line with their way of being.”<sup>5</sup>

A reprimand was swift in coming: “You brood of vipers!” We should not imagine that St. John murmured these words, or that he spoke in a monotone. He undoubtedly had a powerful voice which made his listeners stand up and take notice, so to speak, as if God Himself had spoken. Truth be told, John, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 1:15), represented God and transmitted His will.

Now, the serpent was the animal that Satan used in Paradise to draw Eve into sin. This left such a mark that, despite its being an irrational creature, without free will, and therefore incapable of incurring guilt, it was cursed by the Creator, becoming a symbol of evil from then on. St. John called the Pharisees and Sadducees vipers because they induced others to sin.

Later, Our Lord will repeat this censure in their hearing (cf. Mt 12:34; 23:33) and will add others, still more severe and cutting.

### *Cause of perdition for others*

<sup>7b</sup> “Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”

The Precursor goes on to threaten them, reminding them of God’s impending chastisement. In speaking of fleeing from wrath, he touches again on the subterfuge concocted by the consciences of those who want to be taken as holy by others, yet whose lives are not in keeping with their outward appearances.

Here was a case in point; they were only concerned with their public image and not with an authentic change of life as preached by St. John the Baptist. Those who deceive others like this play the role of the serpent that lied to Eve; they belong

to the “brood of vipers” of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and, with them, incur the divine wrath.

<sup>8</sup> “Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.”

In demanding this, St. John tacitly affirms that the fruits produced until then were contrary to the works of virtue.

Indeed, the Pharisees and Sadducees, each in their own way, took advantage of the power of God’s Word – of which they claimed to be transmitters – to deceive others, side-tracking them from the true Religion. Besides this, as they were not in pursuit of perfection, they gave the bad example typical of hypocrites, who “profess to know God, but they deny Him by their deeds” (Ti 1:16).

How many souls did they cast into hell because of the scandal they caused with their double life? Our Lord Himself would underscore the gravity of this sin: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Mt 23:13).

On the day of Final Judgement, the condemned will rise up to accuse those who were the cause of their perdition.

We can take an important lesson from this: those whose souls are in disorder cannot lead others to virtue. The interior life is fundamental for benefiting one’s neighbour, as the excellent treatise *Soul of the Apostolate* teaches:

“Our interior life ought to be the stem, filled with vigorous sap, of which our works are the flowers. The soul of an apostle should be flooded first of all with light, and inflamed with love, so that, reflecting that light and that heat, it may enlighten and give warmth to other souls as well. That which they have heard, which they have seen with their eyes, which they have looked upon, and their hands have almost handled, this will they teach to men (cf. 1 Jn 1:1).”<sup>6</sup>

### *Appearances will be of no use...*

<sup>9</sup> “And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”

Therefore, the Precursor points out that before the Divine Judge it will be of no use to fall back on appearances: “We have Abraham as our father.”



Pharisees before the Precursor - Cathedral of Bayonne (France)

This argument would have been meaningful for those in attendance since, due to the commonly held notion among the Jews, simply being a descendant of Abraham was, in itself, a guarantee of eternal salvation.

Now, if God can raise up sons to Abraham from rough stones, then it falls to us to invoke His grace, while in this world. However, we can never say that we are true sons of Abraham – in other words, heirs of the promise made to him and to his descendants, that is, to Christ (cf. Gal 3:16) – if we are enmeshed in sin, even if we hide under the cloak of virtue. Our Lord Himself affirms this: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did” (Jn 8:39).

### *The tree shall be known by its fruits*

<sup>10</sup> “Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.”

*How many souls had they not already cast into hell on account of the scandal caused by the duplicity of their life?*

*Those who have not borne good fruit and who have died at enmity with God will be cast into the eternal fire*

After this scathing public accusation, St. John uses the expressive image of a barren tree to give a warning.

If a tree that produces no good fruit should be cut down and thrown into the fire, how much more does this apply to those whose fruits are bad and harmful to others! This is why God sometimes intervenes to cut short the advance of evil; if not, hell would continue piling up with creatures made by Him to render Him perfect and eternal glory in Heaven. The axe lies at the roots of the trees, for “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Prv 15:3).

And eternal fire awaits those who reject conversion, live in sin, and condemn others with their despicable example.

***Proclamation of the Messiah who comes to save... and to condemn***

<sup>11</sup> “I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Suddenly, the discourse changes tone, for the focus switches to Our Lord.

Distinguishing the substantial difference between penitential baptism and the Sacrament which the Redeemer was to bring, John the Baptist emphasizes his complete submission to Jesus, stating that he is unworthy to carry His sandals, a task fit for a simple slave.

Thus, he gives Our Lord the true place of precedence before the people, showing the humility that was a constant in his mission as proclaimer of Christ: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

<sup>12</sup> “His winnowing fan is in His hand. He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Concluding his words, the Precursor reveals who will execute the sentence previously announced: the Messiah, the same who came to save, baptizing “with the Holy Spirit and fire,” is ready to cast the chaff into the “unquenchable fire.”

At Judgement, the illusion of those who think they can “find a way around” God and go to Heaven, despite having lived contrary to His ways, will vanish. There will be no more commiseration or condescendence on the part of the Creator: if the “tree” did not produce what it should have, and dies at enmity with God, it will be cast “into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13:42).

And let us not think that bearing the Christian character will be enough to free us from eternal disgrace. On the contrary, this will only intensify our condemnation, for it implies a greater rejection of grace.

### **III – OUR HOPE MUST BE IN GOD**

The words of St. John on this Second Sunday of Advent invite us to pause for a moment to think about death and judgement – events which none



The condemned are taken to hell - Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris

Gustavo Krajl



"The Final Judgement" by Fra Angelico - Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

of us will escape – and show the need for a change of mentality.

If we look into ourselves honestly, in the light of this Gospel, we will realize how many worldly principles we have allowed to filter into our souls over time, deluding ourselves with a false sense of security and stability.

For example, it could be egalitarianism stemming from pride, or materialism that makes us revolve our lives around technology, money, or the like. And it is from this standpoint that we should consider the conversion to which St. John the Baptist exhorts us, and prepare to appear before God's tribunal.

And we should view this Judge with an altogether Christian hope, that is, with entire confidence in God and in the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who will pardon our sins and miseries if we acknowledge them with repentance.

If we nourish these interior sentiments, we will attain holiness, the goal of all the baptized, and we will reach the full participation in God's life, as the Collect highlights: "Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet Your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to His company."<sup>7</sup> ✧

*We must be prepared for God's judgement, while placing our trust entirely in the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl., q.87, a.2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. GOMÁ Y TOMÁS, Isidro. *El Evangelio explicado*, vol. I: Introducción, Infancia y vida oculta de Jesús. Preparación de su ministerio público. Barcelona: Rafael Casulleras, 1930, p.332; 403; FILLION, Louis-Claude. *Vida de*

Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, vol. I: Infancia y Bautismo. Madrid: Rialp, 2000, p.295.

<sup>3</sup> BOURGET, Paul. *Le démon du midi*, apud CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Revolução e Contra-Revolução*. [Revolution and Counter-Revolution.] (Ed.5). São Paulo: Returnarei, 2002, p.41.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.38, a.3.

<sup>5</sup> MALDONADO, SJ, Juan de. *Comentarios a los Cuatro Evangelios*, vol. I: Evangelio de San Mateo. Madrid: BAC, 1950, p.187.

<sup>6</sup> CHAUTARD, OCSO, Jean-Baptiste. *The Soul of the Apostolate*. Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946, p.51-52.

<sup>7</sup> SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT. Collect. In: THE ROMAN MISSAL. English translation according to the Third Typical Edition approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011, p.146.

# Why Is Christmas Celebrated on December 25?



Many people have ventured to explain why the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated on December 25. Is it the true date on which this event took place?



✠ José Manuel Gómez

Countless events have occurred since man began to inhabit this earth, but few of them are relevant enough to deserve being passed on to future generations. Perhaps this is why so many have undertaken extraordinary measures to accomplish some feat that would give them a share in a much-coveted goal: to appear in the perennial – and selective – pages of that book in which the world writes its memories.

Discoveries, inventions and brilliant works have followed one another, battles have been fought and conquests made... but none of these achievements had the merit of dividing history. It was an apparently unimportant episode unknown to almost everyone at the time, the birth of a Child, which marked humanity for all time. In fact, apart from the Passion, it is impossible to imagine anything so momentous as the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of God who, for love of us and to redeem us, wanted to become Man.

In view of this, it is anything but a futile or insignificant task to define, as far as possible, when was this crucial moment, which St. Paul iden-

tifies as “when the time had fully come” (Gal 4:4). And so we invite the reader to enter these complex but most interesting paths, shrouded in a mysterious mist and lost in the darkness of the ages...

## *The year of the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

For us, accustomed as we are to being situated in the twenty-first century *after Christ*, it is difficult to think of a calendar that does not have the Saviour’s birth as its origin. However, this reference point came into common usage little by little during the Middle Ages.

It was only in the sixth century that the monk Dionysius Exiguus – as he liked to call himself out of humility, despite his notable culture – thought of calculating when the Divine Infant had most likely been born. The religious came to the conclusion that Our Lord’s coming took place in the year 753 of the foundation of Rome, and so he made 754 correspond to the year 1 of the Christian era, thereby dispensing with the need to include a “year zero”.

Although it was not immediately known by all, this new way of reckoning time spread throughout Christendom until it became the most widespread and widely used calendar in the world, in preference to other alternatives, such as that of the Jews or the Chinese.

It is a pity that the calculation made by Dionysius was slightly inaccurate, perhaps owing to an error in counting the years of government of an emperor. In fact, the Gospel states that Our Lord was born during the reign of Herod, who had the Holy Innocents killed in order to eliminate the Messiah with them (cf. Lk 1:5; Mt 2:1,13-18). We know, however, that this monarch died in the spring of the year 750 of the foundation of Rome. Therefore, the birth of Jesus must have taken place at least four years before Christ...

A second piece of information provided by the Gospels is that Our Lord came into this world in the time of Caesar Augustus, who ordered a census when Quirinius was ruling Syria (cf. Lk 2:1-2). There is debate among scholars about this detail, but it is perfectly possible to maintain

that the census took place between 8 and 6 BC. We hope, therefore, not to disturb the piety of any reader by stating that the most probable date of Our Lord's birth lies between 8 and 4 BC.<sup>1</sup>

### **Why December 25?**

The question now arises: what about December 25? Is there any historical reason that justifies the choice of this day for the celebration of Christmas?

The answer is not without its difficulties. First of all, it would seem that the date did not enjoy much importance among the first Christians, since they did not celebrate birthdays. For them, the "*dies natalis*" – the true nativity – was the day of death, when the person closed his eyes to this life and opened them to Heaven. We find a reflection of this custom in the Liturgy, which, in most cases, celebrates the memorials and feasts of the Saints on the date of their death.

This is, we repeat, *in most cases*, but not all. There are some births which, because of their excellence, are commemorated in the Church: that of St. John the Baptist, since he was born cleansed of original sin; that of Our Lady, Immaculate from

her conception; and, of course, that of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Given the importance of God's coming to earth for the Catholic religion, the very Gospel of St. John equates the theology of the Incarnation with that of Easter, presenting them as "the two centres of gravity of one faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the Church does not celebrate Christmas as a mere remembrance of what happened more than two thousand years ago; it is not an anniversary. Through the Liturgy, the Mystical Body of Christ continues the priestly life of its Head,<sup>3</sup> reliving the mysteries that took place then, making them present and being able to share in the same graces received by those who were in the Grotto of Bethlehem, such as Our Lady,

*Considering different sources of historical data, the more likely date of Our Lord's birth may be situated between the year 8 and 4 B.C.*

St. Joseph or the shepherds. Jesus is born anew every year in the hearts of the faithful.

In any case, although it is difficult to affirm that the feast was not celebrated in some way since the beginning of Christianity, references to December 25 as the date of the Solemnity of Christmas are rather scarce until the fourth century, and present historians with some difficulty.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of documents, hypotheses began to emerge.

### **The theory of the feast of "Sol Invictus"**

A widespread explanation is that this date corresponded to a pagan celebration that existed in Rome: the day of the *Sol Invictus*, instituted by the Emperor Aurelianus in 274 AD. The Nativity of Our Lord, the true "Sun of Justice" (Mal 4:2), would have been assimilated to the feast of the false god, in order to eliminate it.<sup>5</sup>

This theory, however, does not satisfy everyone for several reasons. Analysing the psychology of the Christians of that period, it is worth asking: would they contaminate such a sublime feast by assimilating it to a pagan festival? Having just been persecuted by the Romans and preferring to spill their blood rather than



The Census of Quirinius - Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora, Istanbul; previous page, perpetual calendar of the Cathedral of Messina (Italy)

burn a little incense to idols, would they consent to take such a date for the Solemnity of Christmas? These and other motives have led authors such as Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, to affirm that “today the ancient theories according to which the 25th of December arose in Rome in opposition to the myth of Mithras, or also as a Christian reaction to the cult of the *Sol Invictus*, are untenable.”<sup>6</sup> In the work we have quoted, the then Cardinal preferred to defend another theory,<sup>7</sup> perhaps the most poetic and theological of all.

### *The perfection of symbolism*

This hypothesis is based on the symbolism and interpretation of numbers. According to an ancient tradition, the creation of the world began on March 25, a date that the first Christians thought should coincide with the new creation, that is, the death of Our Lord on Calvary. Now, in their reckoning, it was fitting that Christ should spend an exact number of years on this earth. Therefore, not only His Passion, but also His conception should have taken place on March 25. Adding to that the nine months of gestation – equally precise, since Mary’s pregnancy was perfect – the conclusion was reached that Christmas would have occurred on December 25.

Arguing that this tradition was widespread among the faithful even before the rise of the Emperor Aurelian, Ratzinger and the other authors who share the same opinion call into question the theory of the *Sol Invictus*.

However, historically, is that enough for us to affirm with complete certainty that Jesus Christ was born on December 25? Perhaps we need more information.

### *The conception of St. John the Baptist*

Another current calculates the period in which the Saviour was



“The Virgin of the Annunciation”,  
by Giovanni del Biondo - Detroit Institute  
of Art, Detroit (MI)

*It is believed that  
Our Lord was  
conceived on March  
25, the date on  
which, according  
to tradition, the  
world was created*

born on the basis of the Gospels. The four hagiographers, however, do not suggest any specific date for the advent of the Messiah. What we know from their writings is that at the sublime moment of the Annunciation to Our Lady – and consequently of her virginal conception – the Archangel Gabriel mentioned the state of her cousin Elizabeth. She had conceived a child, and it was already the sixth month for her that everyone considered barren (cf. Lk 1:36). In nine months’ time, the Saviour would be born.

Now, if we calculate the period that goes from the conception of St. John the Baptist – six months *before* the Annunciation – to the Nativity of Our Lord – nine months *after* the

Annunciation – we obtain the sum of fifteen months. In other words, the Precursor was conceived one year and three months before Jesus was born. If we can find out the exact date on which Elizabeth became pregnant, it will be easy to define the date of Christ’s birth. However, how can we find the day of the Baptist’s conception?

Although Elizabeth and her husband desired offspring, this was made impossible by their sterility and advanced age. But one day, when Zechariah was “serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the Temple of the Lord and burn incense” (Lk 1:8-9). On that occasion, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him to tell him that the supplications of the two had been answered: his wife would bear a son.

It is known that the priests took turns serving the Temple in groups twice a year. Zechariah belonged to the eighth shift, that of Abijah (cf. Lk 1:5). According to an ancient Christian tradition which dates back to at least the second century, he exercised his priestly functions during the Jewish festival of *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement, which was celebrated at the end of September. Add to that fifteen months, and we arrive at the last days of December, when Our Lord would have been born. Among the staunchest defenders of this thesis is St. John Chrysostom,<sup>8</sup> Patriarch of Constantinople, who used the same argumentation to establish Christmas on the 25th, as we still celebrate it today.<sup>9</sup>

### *Christmas in the Liturgy*

It is clear that, twenty centuries after these events, trying to define the date of Christmas in an indisputable way becomes a very difficult, not to say impossible, task. We can hope that this will be one of

the many questions that we will be able to ask when, by God’s mercy, we reach Heaven and beseech Our Lady to tell us a little of the history surrounding those wonderful and mysterious days when the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

For the moment we must limit ourselves to savouring the crumbs that time has not devoured, in order to identify, to the degree possible, the origin of this solemnity which, together with Easter, constitutes the principal feast of the true Religion.

Nevertheless, much more than a simple historical reality, the celebration of Christmas on December 25 contains a profound theological reality. Providence willed that it be celebrated during the period when,

*When the powers of darkness seemed about to suffocate the day, Our Lord Jesus Christ was born, the “Light of the world”*

in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice occurs – the day of the year when night is longest – in order to better reflect God’s way of acting in history.

At a time when the darkness of sin and death seemed to dominate

the entire universe and the power of darkness was about to suffocate the day, Our Lord Jesus Christ was born, the “Light of the world” (Jn 8:12), who shines in the darkness and whom darkness cannot overcome (cf. Jn 1:5). That night a sentence of extermination was decreed against the empire of the Serpent, driven to retreat by the overpowering rays of the Sun of Justice. Thus, at Christmas, the Divine Infant began the most beautiful of all re-conquests: the Redemption of the human race which – through disobedience – had become enslaved to sin.

This is how God acts in history. When evil seems to be winning, it is an unequivocal sign that its end is near, for the hour of divine intervention has arrived. ✧

<sup>1</sup> Cf. DI BERARDINO, Angelo (Dir.). *Patrología*. Madrid: BAC, 2000, v.IV, p. 237-239; LEAL, SJ, Juan; PÁRAMO, SJ, Severiano; ALONSO, SJ, José. *La Sagrada Escritura. Evangelios*. Madrid: BAC, 1964, v.I, p.570-571.

<sup>2</sup> RATZINGER, Joseph. *El espíritu de la Liturgia. Una introducción*. Madrid: Cristiandad, 2001, p.129.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PIUS XII. *Mediator Dei*, n.2-3.

<sup>4</sup> The oldest reference to December 25 that has come down to us is from St. Hippolytus (cf. *Commentaire sur Daniel*, IV, 23: SC 14, 307), in a work written between 202 and 204. However, many authors dispute the authenticity of the passage in which the date is mentioned.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. RIGHETTI, Mario. *Historia de la Liturgia*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1955, v.I, p.689.

<sup>6</sup> RATZINGER, op. cit., p.130.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Idem, p.131-133. See also: BRADSHAW, Paul. *La Liturgia cristiana en sus orígenes*. Paris: Du Cerf, 1995, p.227-229.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. *Homilia in diem*

*natalem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, n.4: PG 49, 356-358.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the Qumran findings, some scholars have corroborated that the second week of service of Abijah’s watch occurred in late September (cf. FEDERICI, Tommaso. *25 dicembre, una data storica*. In: [www.30giorni.it](http://www.30giorni.it)).



# Cease Fire!

Reproduction

At the height of the Great War, as death and destruction plagued the European continent, the power of faith in some hearts brought an unprecedented scene to the trenches.



✚ Sr. Antonella Ochipinti, EP

**T**he end of the 19th century revealed a dazzling Western civilization, which seemed to have materialized every dream of wealth and splendour hitherto imaginable. At the head of the brilliant Prussian army, Otto von Bismarck asserted: “I am bored; we have already done every great thing”; Germany was enjoying an industrial miracle; the intellectual and cultural wealth of France made Paris the centre of attention, giving rise to the popular expression: “As happy as God in France”; England had complete dominion over the seas; the court of the Russian Empire sparkled with opulence; the young and prosperous United States of America was vigorously developing. Poets, scientists, philosophers and magnates composed the flower of a humanity whose interrelations seemed peaceful.

It was in this frame of mind that men crossed the threshold of the twentieth century. However, their hearts, formerly attached to Heaven through the influence of the Holy Church, now

became bound to this earth under the deceptive enchantment of success and prosperity, and they drifted far from their Creator. And just as the moon, without the magnificence of the sun’s rays, is but an insignificant body submerged in darkness, so men sink into horrors when not enlightened by the light of divine grace... The dark errors of that society were not long in manifesting themselves.

### *One death, an omen of many others*

June 1914. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, had just inspected the summer exercises of some corps of the Imperial Army in Bosnia and observed the military manoeuvres with two of his best generals. On the 28th of that month, he went on to the capital, Sarajevo. While driving through the city in an open car, he was ambushed by an armed assassin, resulting in his death and that of his wife, Sophie.

What some imagined and others perhaps did not even suspect was that

this event, apparently only of great import for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, opened a new chapter in history. That seeming world peace, which, in reality, only cloaked a growing tension between world powers, had just reached its end.

The murder of one couple presaged incalculable other deaths that would ensue in an immense international paroxysm never before seen by man: the First World War, then known as the Great War.

It seems disproportionate that the Sarajevo magnicide should have triggered such a tragic and far-reaching event. This has been an oft-analysed question over the decades, about which historians have raised numerous hypotheses. However, it is certain that the ambition of key figures in the governments of European nations found in this occasion an excellent opportunity to serve their interests.

### *The war begins*

The Austro-Hungarian Empire formally declared war on Serbia on July

28, 1914. Eight days later, eight countries, including five of the six great powers of Europe, were at war with at least one of their neighbours.

Soon the politics of alliances, driven by the hostilities and interests of each nation, gave rise to the two well-known belligerent blocs, formed on one side by Germany and Austria, and on the other by France, England, Russia and, later, the United States.

Millions of men donned their uniforms at the outset of the fighting, imagining that the undertaking would not last long... How wrong they were! The tragedy would last four long years, eventually devastating the European continent and casting into the mud of the trenches the aforementioned splendour that had characterized the *Belle Époque*.

### **Entrenched armies**

On the western front, Germany was advancing rapidly with its characteristic discipline and excellent logistics. Thirty-seven days after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the first German troops crossed the French border after having invaded Belgium, which had opposed their passage. There, they faced the French and British soldiers who joined forces to confront them. The Battle of the Borders had begun, which, being a mere prelude to the fighting, resulted in a calamitous total of two hundred and sixty thousand casualties.

Between advances and retreats, in the Battle of the Marne, which took place in September of 1914, the Franco-British army managed to repel the Germans, who were already about to invade Paris, and forced them to take refuge in the Aisne Valley. At a certain point, how-

ever, a series of failed flanking manoeuvres left both sides with no room to advance... Accordingly, they were forced to build trenches and by November they had dug continuous lines of them, stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss border.

In this so-called “no man’s land”, the advance of troops was stalled, but the exchange of fire was incessant. Wounded and dead soldiers lay all around. Humanity was aghast, scarcely able to recall such a calamity: families torn apart, houses lost and copious bloodshed...

Faced with this disastrous situation, efforts towards a peace treaty began. A group of one hundred and one British dames published an *Open Christmas Letter*, a public message of peace addressed mainly to German and Austrian women; and on December 7, Pope Benedict XV proposed an official truce of the armies: “Let the cannons at least be silent on the night when the Angels sing.” All in vain,

for the requests were rejected. The war would continue.

### **Christmas carols in the heat of the battle**

An unexpected event, however, brought some much-desired peace to those gloomy and blood-soaked days.

After long hours of fighting, tired and mud-covered British soldiers in their trenches watched the night fall. The shooting had ceased, and the stars were shining. Some, perhaps, were nursing their wounds, others were cleaning their weapons; all, despite the great tension, were trying to rest. Suddenly, the sentries saw lights in the neighbouring field. The unusual scene soon caught the attention of several men who were in the shelter and they too began to observe what was happening. It was the night of December 24.

Soon everyone realized what was taking place: the German soldiers, moved by the graces proper to the birth of the Saviour, were improvising a celebration in the middle of the battlefield. Even more amazed, the English heard the singing of *Stille Nacht!*

Surrendering to the same grace, the English also sang a Christmas carol. The hostility between the two armies vanished for a moment, as if by magic...

A private from the London Rifle Brigade, Graham Williams, who was present on that occasion, described the scene as follows:

“Then suddenly lights began to appear along the German parapet, which were evidently makeshift Christmas trees, adorned with lighted candles, which burnt steadily in the still, frosty air! Other sentries had, of course, seen the same thing, and



**Suddenly, the sentries saw lights in the neighbouring field: the German soldiers were improvising a Christmas commemoration**

“The Soldiers’ Christmas”, by Carl Röchling; previous page, German soldiers in trench warfare, by Felix Schwormstädt

quickly awoke those on duty, asleep in their shelters [...]. Then our opponents began to sing 'Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht'. [...] They finished their carol and we thought that we ought to retaliate in some way, so we sang *The First Nowell*. and when we finished that they all began clapping; and then they struck up another favourite of theirs, *O Tannenbaum*. And so it went on. First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up *O Come All Ye Faithful* the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words '*Adeste fidelis*'. Williams concludes his account with the comment: "And I thought, well, this was really a most extraordinary thing – two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war."<sup>1</sup>

### Centre of history, Prince of Peace

In this atmosphere full of joy, a German soldier ventured out of the trench as a sign of peace. His attitude instilled confidence in the others and soon they all jumped unarmed out of their hiding places to greet

each other and exchange gifts such as chocolates, tobacco and souvenirs. They played and sang together, as well as celebrating Christmas by attending a bilingual Mass, celebrated by a Scottish priest. In addition, they returned the bodies of deceased combatants, and even celebrated funerals together.

Captain Robert Miles, of the Shropshire Light Infantry, also recounted, in a letter later published in the *Daily Mail*, what happened that night: "Friday. We are spending the most extraordinary Christmas Day imaginable. There is a sort of haphazard and absolutely unauthorized truce, but perfectly understood and scrupulously observed between us and our friends on the front."

In fact, peace – so idolized nowadays – can only be obtained through the Christian Faith. Under its radiance, all the pseudo-reasons dictated by egocentrism to justify error fade away.

Those Christmas carols, full of piety, illuminated consciences, even if only for a moment: "Why are we fighting? What is the reason for all this enmity? Are we not all children of the same God?" The contentions then disappeared. It was the remnants of Christianity that throbbed in the depths of the hearts of those who, despite the circumstances, still considered Our Lord Jesus Christ the true centre of history.

### Let us desire true peace!

"*Lux in tenebris lucet*" (Jn 1:5), says St. John the Evangelist regarding the Birth of Our Lord. And for humanity of every age, the feast of Christmas is always full of light and promise.

Indeed, in this present year, so threatened by wars, convulsions and terrors, what shall we beseech when we come before the Crèche? Certainly, the end of so many conflicts, some will answer. However, perhaps this is not the most perfect petition. Perhaps it would please God more if we were to implore the sincere conversion of all hearts – beginning with our own – to His Divine Son, King of Peace: then humanity will be able to draw its dearly desired, vital and much-spoken-of peace from the inexhaustible spring where it can truly be found. ✧



Soon all the soldiers jumped unarmed out of their hiding places to greet each other and to exchange gifts

German and English soldiers during the "Christmas Truce", on December 25 of 1914

<sup>1</sup> BROWN, Malcolm. The Christmas Truce 1914: The British Story. In: FERRO, Marc et al. *Meetings in No Man's Land. Christmas 1914 and Fraternalism in the Great War*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2007, p.29.

Photos: Reproduction

# Peace: Precious Gift of Christmas

**O** *beata nox!* Yes, blessed night which saw the birth of a Child who inaugurated a new historical era. On that night humanity was offered a precious gift that would not be taken away even when that Child would return to eternity: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27). [...]

All of Jesus’ words pertain to eternal life and are mysteriously attractive. But when they are recalled before the Nativity scene, they prompt us to probe their meaning, especially the words referring to the peace brought to us on that night. What is the nature of this peace? It is the peace which every human creature avidly desires, but often seeks where it cannot be found, and is mistaken, moreover, regarding its true content and substance!

Is this error not the main reason for the wars and catastrophes that have beset the world for millennia? These spring from the pseudo-peace that the world holds out to us, so unlike that which the Angels proclaimed to the shepherds on that blessed Christmas Eve. [...]

In a message, Benedict XVI has this to say on the same subject: “First of all peace must be built in hearts. It is here, in fact, that sentiments develop that can nurture it or, on the contrary, threaten, weaken and stifle it. Moreover, the human heart is the place where God intervenes. In this regard, in addition to the ‘horizontal’ dimension of relations with other human beings, the ‘vertical’ dimension of each person’s relationship with God, the

foundation of all things, is proving to be of fundamental importance.”<sup>1</sup>

This Christmas, then, despite the present-day crises, the hymnody of the Angels sounds as clearly as it did long ago for the shepherds. It holds out true peace to each one of us individually, inviting us to subject our passions to reason, and reason to faith. It also offers us an end to civil war, class struggle and wars among nations, on the condition that we carefully observe the demands imposed by hierarchy and justice. In brief, to receive this desirable offer of the Angels, we must be reconciled with God, to acknowledge Him as our Legislator and Lord, and to love Him with all our enthusiasm.

St. Cyril explains this with logic and unction: “Look not therefore upon Him who was laid in the manger as a Babe merely, but in our poverty see Him who as God is rich, and in the measure of our humanity Him who excels the inhabitants of Heaven, and who therefore is glorified even by the holy Angels. And how noble was the hymn, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will!’ For the Angels and Archangels, Thrones and Dominations, and high above them the Seraphim, preserving their settled order, are at peace with God: for never in any way do they transgress His good pleasure, but are firmly established in righteousness and holiness. But we, wretched beings, by having set up our own lusts in opposition to the will of Our Lord, had set ourselves as enemies against Him. But by Christ this has been done away: for He is our peace; for He has united us by Himself unto God the Father, having taken away from the middle the



Angells David Ferreira

The Newborn Infant Jesus with the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph - Sacred Heart Church, Tampa (FL)

cause of the enmity, even sin, and so justifies us by faith, and makes us holy and without blame, and calls near unto Him those who were afar off.<sup>2</sup> [...]

And with no less spirituality, St. Jerome adds: “Glory in Heaven, where there is no dissension, and peace on earth, where there is daily strife. And peace on earth.’ And this peace in whom? In men. [...] ‘Peace to men of good will,’ that is, those who receive the newborn Christ.”<sup>3</sup> ✧

Taken from: CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Glory and Peace!*

In: *New Insights on the Gospels*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; *Heralds of the Gospel*, 2013, v.I, p.99-100, 104-106

<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Message on the 20th Anniversary of the Interreligious Meeting of Prayer for Peace*, 2/9/2006.

<sup>2</sup> ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. *Explanatio in Lucae Evangelium*, c.II, v.7: PG 72, 494.

<sup>3</sup> ST. JEROME. *Homilia de Nativitate Domini*. In: *Obras Completas. Obras Homiléticas*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 2012, v.I, p.959.

# Regal and Victorious Presence of the Divine Infant

How similar is today's world to that of the first Christmas! Everything seemed on the point of collapse; nevertheless, souls scattered over the earth awaited a restoration. Will we not also be visited by an event that will free us from our present horror?

✦ **Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira**



Juan Carlos Villagomez

**A** Child is about to be born in Bethlehem! What can we say about this event? When the Word became incarnate and dwelt among us, what was the state of humanity? It was most certainly very similar to our present situation.

## *In a pagan world, some souls awaited a restoration*

Despite the sin of Adam and Eve, there was a kind of patriarchal innocence of the first ages of humanity, the vestiges of which became increasingly rarer throughout history. And one or another person in varied places still reflected this primitive righteousness. These were a handful of isolated people who did not know each other, because they had no contact, and consequently did not form an ensemble, but were nostalgic for a past so distant that perhaps they did not have even a shred of knowledge about it. They looked at the state of humanity of their time, which displayed a terrible decadence, most evident where power and vigour was then greatest: in the Roman Empire.

This was the quintessential, latest and maximum product of progress. However, it would not last long due to its depravity, and would soon meet the inglorious end of being trampled underfoot by the barbarians, whom the Romans despised and regarded as destined to be their slaves, but who would eventually subjugate them.

*That Christmas Eve, certain souls felt that something was about to happen: either the world would end or God would intervene*

This mighty empire ruled over a rotten world. And if it dominated with such ease, it was largely due to its remnants of soundness. Devouring the world, the empire swallowed the rottenness; upon swallowing its con-

quests, these then killed the conqueror. All the vices of the East flowed like torrents into Rome and overwhelmed it. Thus, transformed into a cesspool, a sewer, it in turn spread the same corruption with greater breadth and magnitude.

However, certain souls oppressed by this situation felt that something was about to happen and understood that either the world would end or God's Providence would intervene. The adversity and anguish of these souls reached its limits on Christmas Eve. An era was coming to an end, already in its death throes, although with the appearance of peace, and no one had any idea of what the solution might be.

Yet on that Christmas Eve, so terribly oppressive for everyone, there was a spotlessly chaste couple in a grotto in Bethlehem; the Virgin Spouse, however, was to be a Mother. In that grotto, while they prayed in deep recollection, the Child Jesus came to earth!

## *Authentic adoration*

The shepherds, who recalled the former righteousness, seeing the An-

gels singing and announcing to them the first news – “Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will” (Lk 2:14 Vulg.) – were overjoyed and went out in search of the Manger, bringing their simple gifts to the Child Jesus. It was the first magnificent act of adoration, which we might well call the act of adoration of tradition.

They represented a tradition of pastoral rectitude. Leading a modest life, outside the rottenness of that civilization, the shepherds were the first to hear the proclamation of this great event: “*Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis* – For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given” (Is 9:6).

A little later, at the other end of the social scale, a caravan also arrived; it was another marvel. A star moved across the horizon and, from the depths of the putrid mysteries of the Orient, wise men, magi, wearing the royal crown, set out from their respective kingdoms.

Let us imagine that, at a certain moment, these great monarchs met and re-

vered one another. No doubt each one would have told the others where he came from, and the three would have rejoiced to see that they were united by the same conviction, the same hope and the call to traverse the same path. Finally, they arrived together at the grotto, carrying the three treasures of their respective countries: gold, frankincense and myrrh. And they rendered another adoration to the Child Jesus. It was no longer the tradition of the humblest, but of the loftiest.

This is what is interesting about tradition: it is so all-embracing that it has its own way of residing in every social class. In the bourgeoisie it is manifested simply in stability; in the nobility, by continuity in glory; in the common people, through continuity in innocence. Now, these kings, the pinnacles of the nobility of their respective lands, brought with their royal dignity another high honour: that of being magi. They were wise men, they had studied in a spirit of wisdom and, at the moment they received the order “Go to Bethlehem and there your

hopes will be fulfilled,” their spirits were prepared because of everything they knew about the past.

### *Persecution soon breaks out*

Immediately, the persecution was unleashed. In my opinion, it would not be reasonable, in these circumstances, to meditate on Christmas without taking into account the slaughter of the innocents – a tragedy that so closely follows upon the heavenly peace, the magnificent and supernatural serenity of the “*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*”. That cruel slaughter stained with blood the earth that would later become sacred, because that Child would pour out His Sacrosanct Blood upon it. No sooner had He manifested Himself than the murderous sword of the mighty was raised against Him; as these wonders were being affirmed, the hatred of the wicked rose up against them like a mob.

The killing of the innocents is often considered in a humanitarian way. There is no doubt that this consideration has some relevance. They were innocent and they were killed; they were children slaughtered in a cowardly manner. However, this just and compassionate appraisal blurs, in the modern and naturalistic spirit, the most important consideration: that massacre was the foreshadowing of the decide, for, having received the information that the Messiah was

*No sooner had Jesus manifested Himself than the murderous sword of the mighty was raised against Him to kill Him*



Gustavo Krajič

“The Slaughter of the Innocents”, by Giotto di Bondone - Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua (Italy)

born, the king of the Jews intended to kill Him and, to do so, had all the male children murdered!

Although they were not fully aware that He was the God-Man, in one way or another their intention was to strike, if not God, at least His envoy.

### *The world agonizes yesterday and today*

How similar our life is to that of the men who lived on the eve of “*Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis*”! The world today agonizes as it agonized on the eve of Our Lord’s birth. Everything is bewildering, madness and delirium. Everyone is seeking that which is increasingly slipping away from them, such as well-being, a comfortable life and vile

pleasure – the thirty coins with which each one sells the Divine Master, who implores the defence and the enthusiasm of those whom He has redeemed.

It is very probable in these conditions that some man on the vastness of the earth is lamenting as he watches

*In our days, also,  
will there not be a  
tremendous event  
that will free us  
from all the horror  
in which we  
find ourselves?*

the world fall apart; it is the debacle of Christendom, or, alas, the terrible crisis in the immortal Holy Church, founded and assisted by Our Lord Jesus Christ, in such great decline that, if we believed her to be mortal, we would be led to say that she is dead.

I ask myself: will we not be visited by a tremendous event, perhaps one of the greatest in history – though infinitely small in comparison with Holy Christmas – which will also free us from all the horror in which we find ourselves?

### *What to give and ask of the Child Jesus?*

Coming before the Manger, God willing, we shall celebrate Holy Christmas, and bring our gifts to the Child Jesus, as the Magi and the shepherds did. But what should we give Him? The best gift He wants from us is our own soul, our heart! The Divine Infant desires no other gift from us but this.

Someone will say, “What a paltry gift, giving myself to Him!” Not so! If Jesus receives us into His divine hands, He will convert us into wine as He did with the water at the Wedding at Cana, and we will be transformed. Let us say to Him: “Lord, change me! *‘Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor* – Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow’ (Ps 51:7). Thy gift, O Lord, is the creature who asks Thee: sprinkle me, cleanse me!”

Now this gift we should offer through Our Lady’s intercession, for how can we offer something like ourselves except through Her? And if we do everything through Her, why not also ask Our Lord for a gift through His Mother? Without doubt, the fundamental gift we ought to implore is this: “Lord, change the world! Or, if there is no other way, shorten the days by fulfilling the promises and threats



“The announcement to the shepherds”, by Maître de Jacques de Besançon - National Library of Spain, Madrid

# Prayer Before the Nativity Scene

**O** Divine Infant, here kneeling before Thee is another son of the Church Militant, brought by the grace obtained by Thy divine and heavenly Mother. This combatant is here, above all, to thank Thee.

I thank Thee for the life Thou hast given to my body, for the moment in which Thou didst breathe into my soul and for Thine eternal plan concerning me, according to which I should occupy, by divine design, a certain place, however modest, among the ensemble of men, so as to compose the immense mosaic of human creatures destined to ascend to Heaven.

I thank Thee for having marked my path with struggle, so that I could be a hero, and for the strength Thou hast given me to pray, to resist and to drive away the devil.

I thank Thee for all the years of my life spent in Thy grace, as well as those lived outside of it, but which were brought to an end by Thee at

the moment I abandoned the path of sin and returned to Thy friendship.

I thank Thee, Child Jesus, for all the arduous efforts which, with Thy assistance, I have made in combating my defects, and for not losing patience with me, preserving my life so



Dr. Plinio in December of 1988

that I would still have time to correct them before my death.

And if there is one thing I would like to ask of Thee this Christmas, Lord Jesus, it is this, paraphrasing a verse from the Psalm: “Do not take my life in the middle of my days” (Ps 102:23). Do not shorten my days in the middle of my life’s work, and grant that my eyes may not be closed by death, that my muscles may not lose their vigour, that my soul may not lose its strength and agility, before I, by Thy grace, have overcome all my faults and ascended to all the interior heights that Thou didst destine for me to attain, and have rendered to Thee, by heroic deeds on Thy battlefield, all the glory that Thou didst expect of me when creating me! So be it. ✧

*Prayer orally composed by  
Dr. Plinio on December 23, 1988  
with slight adaptations for the  
written language*

of Fatima! But for those who still persevere, at least, Lord, have pity on them, shorten their days of affliction and bring the Reign of Thy Mother as soon as possible.”

While we are singing “*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*” and the other sacred carols of Christmas, there is one thing we should keep clearly in mind. The memory of the event that occurred two thousand years ago is very beautiful and very good, especially because we have the conviction that Our Lord continues to be present in His Holy Church and in the Holy Eucharist, and that His Mother aids us from Heaven. On earth, however, we must ask for the regal and victorious presence of the Divine Infant!

We can even formulate this request in another manner: “*Ut inimicos Sanctæ Matris Ecclesiæ humiliare digneris, te rogamus audi nos!*” Newborn Lord, resting in the arms of Thy

*Let us beseech the  
newborn Child  
Jesus that He deign  
to humiliate and  
punish the enemies  
of the Holy Roman  
Catholic Church*

Mother as on the most splendid throne that an earthly king has ever had or ever will have, we beseech Thee: deign to humiliate, debase and punish the enemies of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, beginning with the most terrible; and these are not the external, but the internal ones! Divest them of their influence, their prestige, their numbers and their capacity to do harm.”

In short, let us ask for the most exquisite form of Our Lord’s victory: the crushing of His adversaries and the victory of His Blessed Mother! ✧

Taken, with adaptations, from:  
Dr. Plinio. São Paulo. Year XXIV.  
N.285 (Dec., 2021); p.8-10

BLESSED MARIA VICTORIA FORNARI STRATA

## **“Everything passes and all is naught, except God”**

From mother of several children to foundress of a Religious Order, the life of Blessed Maria Victoria can be summed up in her filial abandonment to the will of the Creator, following the example of Our Lady.



✠ Sr. Angelis Ferreira, EP



Reproduction

**I**n a beautiful Genoese mansion, the family doctor was giving the Fornari couple serious news. The situation of Giovanni Francisco, the youngest son of Girolamo and Barbara, seemed hopeless.

In the midst of this drama, a voice full of candour strove piously to reassure the parents, saying that there was “a doctor in Heaven who has remedies better than all those on earth, and that it was only necessary to have recourse to Him and to invoke Him with confidence” to be assured that the child would recover his health. “I give you my word,” the girl concluded.

Who was this girl who, despite her tender years, displayed the faith and wisdom of a saint?

### ***Family upbringing and marriage***

Maria Victoria Fornari Strata was born in 1562 in the bustling city of Genoa. She was the seventh of nine children born to Girolamo Fornari and Barbara Veneroso, a couple known for their good morals and piety.

Of an impulsive temperament, little Maria Victoria learned moderation, inspired by the example of her parents. It is said that she always showed exemplary zeal and great responsibility in the fulfilment of her obligations, which would be confirmed years later in the guidance of her Religious Order.

She had an early desire to follow the consecrated life, but on the advice of her parents she married Angelo Strata at the age of seventeen. He was a devout man, and together they were able to reconcile their religious duties with the responsibilities of domestic life.

They prayed the Rosary as a family every day and, as ardent devotees of the wounds of Christ, they sought refuge in them during the difficulties of marriage, of livelihood and of rearing their children.

### ***Loss of her husband and abandonment to Mary***

In 1587, after only eight years of marriage, her husband fell gravely ill and died within a few days. One of the most difficult phases of her life was beginning. Widowed at

just twenty-five years of age, eight months pregnant and with five other children to care for, Maria Victoria felt emotionally weak and incapable of carrying out the mission that had fallen to her.

She was able to face this tremendous ordeal by turning with confidence to the mercy of Our Lady. Once, while in her room, she knelt before a painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus, and tearfully begged Her: “O compassionate Virgin, I implore Thee as much as I know and can: by thy goodness, deign to take these children of mine as thy servants and children, for, being already deprived of their father, for my part they can also be called orphans and motherless.”<sup>22</sup>

While she was praying, the Blessed Virgin held out her arms to her, saying: “Have no doubts, for I will watch over not only your children, but also over you: this household will always be under my special care and protection. Rejoice and do not fear. I want only one thing from you; leave everything else to me: from

now on, seek to love God above all creatures.”<sup>33</sup>

After such a consoling vision, she felt that the great anguish that was oppressing her had subsided and, filled with hope, she overcame the temptations of despair and sadness.

Her response to Our Lady’s promise “was prompt and complete, and took the form of a vow of perfect and perpetual chastity, by which Maria Victoria pledged not only to renounce all human love but to reclaim a spiritual virginity.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, she would no longer wear gold or silk dresses, and would abandon her worldly circles, devoting herself exclusively to the education of her children until such time as she could embrace the religious life in the cloister.

However, her gratitude made her desire even more for the glory of the Almighty, and Our Lady inwardly assured her that this longing corresponded to the divine will: her children would also consecrate themselves to God, and she herself would serve Him by founding a new Order.

### *A religious outside the cloister*

Being a member of a pious association that was directed by a Jesuit priest, Fr. Bernardino Zanoni, Maria Victoria took him as her spiritual director.

A zealous and habile pastor of souls, Fr. Zanoni counselled this strong-willed and determined soul to persevere with confidence in the promises made to Our Lady, spurring her on to constant progress in virtue.

In addition to tending to the duties of her children’s upbringing, she began to perform numerous charitable works, as her condition allowed, which soon garnered her the incomprehension of many of her peers in Genoese high society.

It is said that having a sick maid, her director recommended that she submit to her will in everything that was not sinful. She thus endeavoured,

with all her affection and attention, to provide the sick woman with the best possible care. The patient, however, of a capricious and ungrateful nature, disdained this solicitude, preferring to seek treatment from others.

But finding no one who would help her, the servant had to be hospitalized. As soon as she heard of what had happened, Maria Victoria went to the hospital help her with redoubled dedication, without showing the least resentment.

There was also a poor dying woman who, tormented by the devil, violently spat on the crucifix and shouted blas-

*After the death of her husband, she made a vow of chastity and received a promise from Our Lady: she would found a new Order*



Blessed Maria Victoria Fornari Strata; previous page, a portrait of the Blessed - Convent of the Most Holy Annunciation and Incarnation, Serra Riccò (Italy)

phemies. The unfortunate woman related before she died that the evil spirit disappeared in terror every time the pious widow visited her. The family then asked her to remain at the bedside of the sick woman, who finally died in peace.

Her presence transmitted so much serenity that few suspected that this woman of such simple and peaceful demeanour, willing to help anyone who needed her, was of a choleric and impetuous temperament.

### *Founding of the Order of the Most Holy Annunciation*

Having set all of her children on the path of virtue, there was no longer anything to bind her to the world. The time had come to do what she had promised to the merciful Virgin. To this end, she could rely on the help of Fr. Zanoni, as well as the support of a couple from Genoese society, Stefano Centurione and Vicentina Lomelini, who, after a retreat, had also decided to embrace the religious state. Vicentina was to join Maria Victoria in the new foundation, on the advice of Fr. Zanoni, and Stefano, who was to be ordained a few years later, was to become her great benefactor.

With a series of difficulties behind her, both material and ecclesiastical, the Order of the Most Holy Annunciation was founded on June 19, 1604, “under the obligation of exterior cloister and interior recollection, and dedicated in a special way to the adoration of the Incarnate Word and of the Blessed Eucharist.”<sup>35</sup>

Temporarily using a small building, the nuns would wear a white habit with a blue scapular and mantle, completed by a black veil. It is said that in order to overcome adversity, Mother Maria Victoria kept repeating “Mary of the Annunciation, Mary exalted, be always our Mother and Advocate.”<sup>36</sup>

In fact, problems were not long in coming. Stefano Centurione began to

interfere in the running of the convent, encouraging the sisters to adopt the Carmelite rule, which would result in the loss of the characteristics proper to the new institute.

This brought dissention and disunity among the religious, causing the foundress great suffering. Accustomed to entrusting herself to the Blessed Virgin as a child in her mother's arms, Maria Victoria turned now to her intercession, as she had done after the death of her husband, hearing words of comfort from Her again: "What troubles you, Victoria? Why do you weep? This monastery is mine. It was I who established it, and I will take care of it. Have no doubt, everything will be rectified. I will be the Mother of all the nuns of this house and the Guardian of the entire Order."<sup>77</sup>

Without Maria Victoria having to take any concrete measures, Our Lady began to move the souls of each of the rebels, making them understand that they should not change the original charism.

On September 7, 1605, the religious made their solemn perpetual profession and received three new sisters.

### *Mother of many daughters*

In 1608 the nuns moved to a new monastery, known as Casteletto. This foundation was a desire that the Mother Prioress had carried in her heart for years, because it would bring her daughters more favourable conditions for meditation and contemplation.

It was here that new supernatural gifts blossomed in the soul of the foundress for the benefit of all. A keen discernment of spirits and an extraordinary ability to solve spiritual problems allowed her to penetrate the interior universe of her daughters in order to help them.

As a biographer said, she "was born to be a mother, and her vocation flourished in a spiritual and supernatural way, of which natural motherhood was but a symbol."<sup>8</sup>

One of the nuns, for example, was completely unable to expose a problem of conscience to the superior. Approaching that daughter, Mother Maria Victoria told her to have



Our Lady manifests herself to Blessed Maria Victoria

*The Most Blessed Virgin assured her: "I will be the Mother of all the nuns of this house and the Guardian of the entire Order"*

no fear, for she herself would relate everything. And she began to describe the sister's inmost thoughts and to resolve difficulties that she had kept in her heart, only for herself and God.

Another nun, distraught over a fault she had committed, had difficulty in asking the foundress for forgiveness. One day, while the sister was praying in the chapel, the mother put her hand on her shoulder and told her not to worry because everything was already forgiven. The sister, who had told no one of her intentions, redoubled her confidence in her spiritual mother.

She possessed, moreover, a rare ability to reassure distressed souls, filling them with consolation and serenity, often without even uttering a word. Sometimes it was enough for the nuns to look at her face for them to feel comforted.

### *Exemplary religious*

On October 25, 1611, her term as Prioress came to an end, and the community, judging her tired and worn out by the obligations of the office, decided to elect another religious as Prioress. Thus began a new phase of heroism and pure love for the cross in her life.

The new prioress, Mother Maria Giovanna Tacchini, treated Mother Maria Victoria with a harshness and distrust that served to further deepen her humility and submission. She seemed deliberately intent on mortifying the foundress, treating her as the least of the nuns and the most capricious novice.

Yet her meekness in accepting the humiliations imposed on her was exemplary, to the point of edifying the others. One of the novices learned only years later that this religious of impeccable obedience was the very Foundress of the Order...

Mother Maria Giovanna later recognized how unjust she had been towards Mother Maria Victoria, and that surely her fault had been permitted by God to further exalt the latter's noble virtues and holiness.



At left, Convent of the Most Holy Annunciation and Incarnation, Serra Riccò (Italy); at right, the church of the same convent, where the incorrupt body of Blessed Maria Victoria reposes

In fact, despite these trials, her generosity towards others – the gauge of true love of God – in no way lessened. During her time as infirmarian, she applied herself with outstanding diligence to the care of the others, never giving in to fatigue and devoting herself especially to those who had persecuted her most.

***“Everything passes and all is naught, except God”***

Nine years before her death, Mother Maria Victoria had predicted that when the nuns of the monastery numbered forty, the maximum stipulated by the constitutions, she would be ready to surrender her soul to God. It was with deep joy that she saw this number reached, for the happy day was drawing near.

The first symptoms of her final illness appeared on December 3, 1617, the feast of St. Francis Xavier, on which occasion she attended

*After the news of her death, a multitude swarmed into the monastery to venerate the body of the foundress and to obtain some memento*

Mass and received Communion. Thereafter she spent twelve days in pain and suffering, waiting for her soul to be taken to its eternal dwelling place.

On December 15, 1617, the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom she so loved, came to take her. She was fifty-five years old, thirteen of which she had lived as a nun. Immediately, a sweet fragrance pervaded the room in which

she was lying, even permeating the cloths laid out there.

It was not long before the monastery was swarming with crowds who came to venerate the body. The tunic of her habit was divided in tiny pieces to be distributed among the Genoese people, with only her veil and mantle kept intact. Fr. Francesco Ottagio, a Theatine religious who had been pronounced beyond hope by doctors, recovered his health by touching one of these fragments. Various cures and miracles followed. In 1629 the body, incorrupt, was transferred to the monastery choir for the veneration of the nuns.

From mother of several children to founder of a Religious Order, the admirable life of Blessed Maria Victoria can be summed up in her filial abandonment to the will of the Creator, following the example of Our Lady: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to thy word” (Lk 1:38). ✧

<sup>1</sup> VITA DELLA BEATA MARIA VITTORIA FORNARI STRATA. Roma: Bernardino Olivieri, 1828, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> LUPI, Angela. *Due volte madre*. 2.ed. Milano: San Paolo, 2000, p.36-37.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, p.37.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p.38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, p.70.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p.89.

<sup>7</sup> VITA DELLA BEATA MARIA VITTORIA FORNARI STRATA, op. cit., p.99.

<sup>8</sup> LUPI, op. cit., p.107.

# “By this we shall know that we are of the truth!”

If we wish to go to Heaven, there is only one worthy garment with which to appear before the Divine Judge. What is it and how do we acquire it?



✠ Sr. Leticia de Sousa, EP

Let us imagine ourselves on board a troop transport plane, at an altitude of over five thousand metres. The passengers are paratroopers and are getting ready, like us, to jump for the first time from this altitude. It is impossible not to feel fear! Some entrust themselves to divine protection, while others vie to be the first in line. We all take our positions.

The time has come, dear reader; it's our turn! Three, two, one...

Jump!

“Immersed” in the celestial blue, now only silence accompanies us. However, over the strong pounding of our heart, a soft voice makes itself heard within us.

“How am I leading my life? Have I been doing well lately, fulfilling my obligations? How close am I to following my Christian vocation? If I should die when I hit the ground, am I ready to appear before God?” To these silent queries, various answers present themselves, until... thud! We finally land, safe, sound and relieved.

The cheers, the greetings from our companions and the effusive comments from everyone distract us from

our previous reflections and, finally, it is all over. All except one doubt: what was that mysterious murmur that came over us during the jump?

### *Innate moral law*

Keen but discreet, respectful but persistent, encouraging or admonishing, this hidden voice tends to make itself heard not only when our lives are at risk, but in the most varied circumstances, especially at moments when we need to choose between good and evil. It comes from the innermost part of our own being.

Philosophy teaches that each of us, from birth, has the natural law

*Man must choose between good and evil, based on the Law of God written not only in the Decalogue, but also in the human heart*

engraved in our soul, the self-evident principle of human moral activity,<sup>1</sup> which enables us to distinguish by simple reason what is right from wrong, truth from falsehood,<sup>2</sup> and by which we know what we should do and what we should avoid. This law – which is perfectly expressed in the revealed law, that is, in the Decalogue – was written by God on tablets not of stone but of flesh: our hearts. And



Moses receives the tablets of the Law, “Altarpiece of the Transfiguration”, by Jaume Huguet - Cathedral of Tortosa (Spain)

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“The Seven Virtues”, by Francesco Pesellino - Birmingham Museum of Art (Alabama)

the secret of a coherent and virtuous life lies in being faithful to this innate discernment.<sup>3</sup>

St. Paul sums it up well in his Letter to the Romans: “When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them” (2:14-15).

There is, therefore, within us a kind of permanent and universal knowledge about the good we should do and the evil we should avoid, called *synderesis*. In the field of practical action, the “advice” of our reason – which approves or censures our intentions, acts and conduct or that of others – is called *conscience*. It is the conscience that “talks” to us at every moment, with the aim of guiding us towards our ultimate goal: sanctity.

### ***The mirror of the soul***

The word conscience comes from the Latin *conscientia*, which means knowledge, notion or inner sense. It “is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as a mirror reflects the physical state of a material body, the conscience “is the mirror in which one sees the exterior and interior state of man, that of his body and that of

*Our conscience is the guide that shows us how to walk in the direction of sanctity, as well as how far we are from it*

his soul.”<sup>5</sup> In it “the soul, using the eyes of reason, sees [...] its beauty or ugliness, its purity or its blemishes.”<sup>6</sup> Conscience is thus the guide that shows us how to walk towards sanctity and how far we are from it.

The clarity of the image we have of ourselves depends on the care we take in guarding against the blemishes of our faults. For just as dust and other residues stain a mirror and mar its clarity, sin dulls the conscience and does not allow us to accurately see the state of our soul.

In fact, if we become accustomed to vice, the inner voice of our conscience will gradually become weaker and weaker, until it is almost extinguished. By losing that compass which points us in our true direction, we condemn ourselves to an unbridled decadence. In extreme cases, our spiritual “mirror” can become so blurred that we begin to regard our defects as wonderful qualities...

Therefore, if we want to preserve our Christian sanity and journey towards Heaven, it is indispensable for us to cultivate a good conscience. This knowledge is immortal, for we will carry it into eternity; it “will unfailingly be the cause of each one’s glory or inexorable confusion, according to the quality of the things placed in it.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***The columns of our spiritual house***

St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a treatise – from which we have already quoted some passages – on conscience, which he defines as the science of the heart or knowledge of oneself and the basis of perfection. In this work, the Cistercian Saint compares conscience to a house founded on solid columns, which he numbers as seven: “good will; memory, constant recollection of God’s benefits; a pure heart; a free understanding; an upright spirit; a devout soul; and enlightened reason.”<sup>8</sup> Let us consider some of them.

The first column is the good will of man, “for it is by goodness of will that all good begins.”<sup>9</sup>

The story is told that a nun once wrote to a virtuous priest asking for guidance on how to attain sanctity. After a long wait and much insistence, she received a brief note in reply, with this single inscription: “If you desire it.” If *we desire it*, dear reader, we will have already taken the

decisive step towards uprightness of conscience.

But we will not persevere long in our good intentions if we do not keep the torch of love burning bright and well supplied! And to do this, St. Bernard advises us to have recourse to the memory of the benefits God has bestowed upon us.

Let us always consider how, “despite the multitude and magnitude of our sins, His mercy never grew weary; when we forgot Him, He himself warned us; [...] if we repented, He forgave us without delay; if we persevered, it was because He himself safeguarded us. [...] When we were purified by tribulation, He restored to us perfect peace, sweet rest. [...] Let us remember so many benefits He bestowed on us without our requesting them”;<sup>10</sup> in this way it will be easy for us to love Him and to employ all our energies in serving Him.

Other important pillars pointed out by St. Bernard are the upright spirit and the pure heart.

To have an upright spirit means to seek “above all the things of God, to please Him alone.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, uprightness must move us to enter into our heart, to go through it and scrutinize it with all diligence, to reflect on what we do and what we ought to do. We must analyse each day whether we have improved or fallen, what are the thoughts that habitually assail us, the affections and desires that most often solicit us, the temptations with which the devil most attacks us. We cannot allow anything foreign to



St. Bernard of Clairvaux - Provincial Museum, Pontevedra (Spain)

*St. Bernard teaches that the conscience is the basis of perfection, and should be founded on seven columns, the first of which is good will*

enter our interior life, nor harbour in our conscience any offence against God, however slight it may seem to us, always remembering our past faults with repentance.

Only in this way will we have a pure heart, “free from the cares of the world, from evil desires, evil

thoughts and pleasures of the flesh, [...] sufficiently steadfast that it should not be moved by any sudden disturbance, nor be drawn away by illicit pleasures, nor be corrupted and overwhelmed by any evil, by any setback.”<sup>12</sup>

This requires a great effort on our part: “the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force” (Mt 11:12)! But let us not forget that purity of conscience will never be attained by those who have not united their honest efforts to ardent desires and supplications to Divine Goodness, for the human soul cannot win it by its own strength; it is above all a gift of God.

### *Let us pray and fight!*

If, dear reader, we take care to observe this wise counsel, if we continually “cleanse” our souls by confessing our sins, by making satisfaction, by good works and especially by persistence in these works, we will undoubtedly attain the tranquillity of a good conscience, “to which God does not impute either personal sins, because he did not commit them, or those of others, because he did not approve of them.”<sup>13</sup>

It is a hard but fruitful battle! Let us pray, let us stand fast and let us fight: blessed are those who know how to approve or reprove themselves, “for he who displeases himself pleases God”;<sup>14</sup> and those who please Him, even if they suffer misfortunes on this earth, will rejoice eternally in His presence! ✧

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q.94, a.2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CCC 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. Os princípios da ação moral: caminho seguro para chegar à santidade [The

Principles of Moral Action: Sure Way to Reach Sanctity]. In: *Lumen Veritatis*. São Paulo. Year IV. N.13 (Oct.-Dec., 2010); p.12.

<sup>4</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Gaudium et spes*, n.16.

<sup>5</sup> ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX. *Tratado da consciência ou do conhecimento de si mesmo*. Itapevi: Nebli, 2015, p.53-54.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p.54.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, p.27

<sup>9</sup> Idem, ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, p.29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, p.31.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, p.49.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, p.65.

# Called to Purity of Heart



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Throughout our pilgrimage on this earth, we are constantly called to sanctity, so that one day we may contemplate our Creator for all eternity. This will be the reward of those who preserve a pure heart.



↳ Santiago Rodríguez

**M**usic speaks directly to the soul, tugging at the strings of our highest sensibility, modelling states of mind, often framing poems or prayers which acquire greater eloquence through the harmonization of instruments and voices.

In the Principality of Wales, in the United Kingdom, there is a hymn from the 19th century which is noteworthy for its joyous and spirited melody, but above all for its lyrics which, although simple, carry a great depth of meaning, since they form a true prayer which asks for a pure heart, *Calon Lân* in its original language.

I invite the readers to let themselves be transported by the stanzas of this song and to follow a deeper analysis of its verses.

## *The true treasure of life*

This is how the song begins:  
*I do not ask for a life of luxury  
The world's gold or its fine pearls,  
I ask for a happy heart,  
An honest heart, a pure heart.*

Already in this introduction we are able to contemplate the longings of a soul that has understood the emptiness of worldly riches and even of sensual

pleasures, which, ephemeral and deceptive, are always frustrating. What an incomparable treasure it is to have a pure heart! An honest and entirely sincere heart, which for love of the truth detaches itself from creatures, lives calmly and contentedly even in the direst material poverty, because it preserves a clear conscience in the certainty of having acquired nothing unjustly. Those who have such a heart understand that if they lack the futile things of this earth, they can enjoy with greater freedom what is of real value: the serene peace of a heart in which God dwells.

Why should we wait any longer to ask for this? Let us pray insistently,

*What an  
incomparable treasure  
it is to have a pure  
heart that is detached  
from creatures and  
can be content in  
any situation!*

as Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7).

## *“Make our hearts like the Heart of Jesus”*

*A pure heart, full of goodness  
Fairer than the beautiful lily*

A heart more pure and beautiful than the lily? Knowing our own miseries, this comparison may seem fanciful to us... Nevertheless, at the end of the Litany of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we ask the Blessed Virgin to make our heart like that of Jesus. Now, is there anything comparable to the pulchritude and purity of this Sacred Heart?

We see then how insignificant is the comparison with the lily, for all the beauties of the material universe could not rival even a glimmer of light from this Divine Heart. We need to have faith and to desire, more than anything else on earth, to be consumed in the ardent love of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

## *A pure heart beats only for God*

The refrain continues, with greater eloquence:

*Only a pure heart can sing;  
Sing by day and sing by night.*

These two lines reveal a sublime truth: only he who has purified his heart, divesting himself of all earthly and human affection, will obtain the priceless ability to sing joyfully, day and night, in both tranquillity and tribulation.

This is because a pure heart does not live for itself but beats only in God and for God, desiring that His holy will alone be done; and in Him it finds infinite charity to overflow upon creatures.

Blessed are those who know how to place their hope in the Lord with no attachment to earthly things, as St. Paul exhorts in his Epistle to the Philippians: “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (4:6).

### ***“Blessed are the pure of heart”***

The pure heart understands that even the worst and most absurd things that may befall it do not escape Divine Providence. It fears nothing; confident and grateful, in it rests the arms of the Heavenly Father and sings, putting into practice the teaching of the Apostle: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance” (Phil 4:4-5).

Moreover, the pure heart longs to transmit this joy to those around it, and its only desire is to enkindle in all souls love for God. That is why its music is made up of charity placed at the service of others, since – as St. Bernard of Clairvaux told his sister, Blessed Humbeline – the secret of happiness in the midst of activity is summed up in three words: “Loving is serving”.

As a reward, he will obtain the one true peace of those who live in

Jesus Christ and possess God. Possess God? Yes, Our Lord declared that blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (cf. Mt 5:8). Now St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that “to see, according to the Scriptures, means to have. For example: ‘See the



The Sacred Heart of Jesus -  
Private collection

*Nothing in the  
universe can  
compare with the  
purity of the Sacred  
Heart of Jesus,  
which our heart  
should resemble*

goods of Jerusalem’ is the same as to ‘find’ such goods. [...] Therefore, whoever sees God possesses all that is good through that vision. He possesses life everlasting, eternal incorruptibility, immortal happiness, the kingdom without end, continual joy, true light, the spiritual and gentle word, intangible glory and perpetual exultation. In short, he possesses all goods.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus we receive the promise to possess, or rather to be possessed and inhabited, even during this life, by the Most Holy Trinity.

### ***If you want joy, prepare for war***

Purity of heart means purity of intention; that is, doing everything exclusively for love of God. Nevertheless, we can only attain this goal by dying. And not just once: we must die to self every day and every instant; renounce ourselves and carry the cross, which is a light and easy yoke when we learn to sing with gratitude day and night.

Evidently, to do this we must be ready to fight the fiercest enemy we will have until the day of our death: ourselves. This means fighting against evil tendencies, concupiscence, laziness and selfishness.

In the truly pure heart unfailingly burns a form of combative and destructive love, a fire that annihilates every kind of evil. It has a holy intolerance for lies and error, because it shares in the Truth, which is God. And it never sheathes its sword! “*Si vis pacem para bellum* – If you want peace, prepare for war” – says the Roman proverb. We could just as well say: *Si vis letitiam para bellum* – If you want joy, prepare for war. Fighting with love for God’s glory, we will always be happy.

### ***Sow riches to reap the reward***

The hymn ends with this stanza:  
*If I wished for worldly wealth,*



Llywelyn2000 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Snowdonia National Park (Wales)

*It would swiftly go to seed;  
The riches of a virtuous, pure  
heart  
Will bear eternal profit.*

We will have obtained from God the grace of a pure heart if a consuming apostolic zeal begins to burn in our souls. We will go out immediately to sow this wealth, because such a heart is detached and knows, according to the phrase attributed to Saint-Exupéry, that “love is the only thing that increases when it is shared”; and not only that: it yields, above all, an eternal reward.

*Evening and morning, my wish  
Rising to Heaven on the wing of  
song  
For God, for the sake of my  
Saviour,  
To give me a pure heart.*

The pure in heart sings, and sings without ceasing, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, because it understands that everything that comes from the Father’s Heart is for his greater well-being. How beautiful and how pleasing to God it would be if we constantly gave thanks for the

*Those who keep  
their hearts pure  
will have as a  
reward the peace  
of those who live  
in Jesus Christ  
and possess God*

good things we obtained from Him. It would be nobler still if we expressed gratitude not only for the joys we have received but also for our sorrows and trials, as Job proclaimed: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (2:10);

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21).

A pure heart recognizes that everything comes from the Most High; He who created us in His image and likeness knows better than we what we need in order to enjoy eternal joys and to contemplate Him in all His glory and splendour. His desire is to see us attain to the fullness of the virtues, for “God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness” (1 Thes 4:7).

Therefore, the zeal of those who preserve the purity of their heart will not be in vain. ✧

<sup>1</sup> ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA. *De beatitudinibus. Oratio VI*: PG 44, 1266.

Hear the hymn *Calon Lân* directly on your cell phone.





## The “Sum of the Ages” of a Venerable Lady

Someone could ask: at that time of such great transformation, what was the role that Dona Lucilia played? It was, above all, one of heroic fidelity to tradition and Catholic principles.

✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

**O**n April 22, 1946, Dona Lucilia completed 70 years... Seventy years of life is a milestone. At this stage, all of the preferences and mannerisms that guided the unfolding of an existence are crystallized. In those who sought to follow the path of virtue, the “sum of the ages” shines with full splendour in the facial expression, through the words, gestures, actions, and personal presence. It is the sum of baptismal innocence, childhood dreams, adolescent hopes, youthful vigour, the strength and stability of maturity, the fragrance of the ripeness of middle age, to which are added the silvery notes of old age, tempered by the sufferings which have polished the soul throughout life, transforming it into a type of diamond in the eyes of God.

It is opportune to bear in mind that, in this polishing, Dona Lucilia was not spared a suffering that had been entirely unforeseen before the death of Dona Gabriela – that of financial reversals. But if Dona Lucilia had

been a prosperous person, perhaps she would never have attained the spiritual heights that she did. For example, had the family been successful in business and had Dona Lucilia enjoyed the fullness of good fortune, a component in her life would have been missing – the value of valiantly upholding the position that she had inherited from her ancestors, amid difficulty. The comparison can be made with some castles, which while desolate and in ruins, outdo other intact structures in grandeur. From a certain standpoint, a leprous Job upon his dunghill was more magnificent than Solomon in all of his splendour.

### *Noble gravity and tenderness*

On the other hand, Dona Lucilia’s Brazilian affectivity set in French terms was honed; it was a delicate, refined and noble affection, conserved even within the privacy of the home, and regardless of the occasion.

She had a most expressive way of making even the simplest request to Dr. Plinio:

“*Filhão*, you wouldn’t mind fetching such-and-such an item for your mother would you?” Her form was never harsh; it was always affable and decorous.

A certain air of seigniorial gravity, befitting a lady of old São Paulo, shone in all of her attitudes, even as she went through the rooms of her own home, for example, to fetch a piece of sewing material. This side of her personality formed a harmonic contrast with her tenderness, which had a preeminent place in her life.

She used a rocking chair brought from the United States by an uncle. She preferred to get up unaided, rising to her feet on her own in a stately way. Her step was generally swift and discreet, but at times it could be slow and solemn as she withdrew to her quarters...

### *Exceptional piety*

Over the course of those 70 years Dona Lucilia never wavered in her love for Our Lady, whose omnipotent intercession before the Sacred Heart

of Jesus she understood so well. The Blessed Virgin had cared for her from the moment of her birth, for Dona Gabriela had chosen the Holy Virgin of *Penha* as her godmother.

In the same oratory that housed the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in her bedroom, was another, smaller image of Our Lady of Graces. On the left side of the bed, a second wooden oratory affixed to the wall contained a statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. And, as could be expected of one so devoted to the Blessed Virgin, the recitation of the Holy Rosary – even in childhood – held a prominent place in her devotions. Her Marian devotion shone especially during the month of May when she would place flowers before some of the statues of Our Lady in the house.

Dona Lucilia belonged to the Association of Christian Mothers and participated in some of its retreats, with due recollection, seriousness and love.

Another testimony of her continual state of prayer comes in the form of numerous prayer books that she carefully kept in a drawer in her bedroom to have at hand when she desired.

As the years went by, she did not lessen her desire to participate in religious solemnities, in which she could satisfy the highest aspirations of her exceptional piety, in spite of the effort which the weight of 70 years of suffering required.

### ***Firm in sweetness, sweet in firmness***

These customs gradually shaped Dona Lucilia's soul, and her great act of heroism consisted in remaining ever faithful to Catholic principles; or, rather, of becoming ever more similar to her Divine Model, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This implied living out a daily, moment-by-moment martyrdom, for the prevailing attitude was one of concession and compromise toward evil. She needed unbreakable rectitude, and to engage in a continual

and all-out fight to guard her unshakable position of fidelity.

But through it all, her sweetness showed how human her rectitude was. Were it not for this, it could hint of heartlessness.

*Baccarat* crystal, which is strong, but has some flexibility, could be taken as a symbol of this lady, whose soul had these qualities, par excellence. Her delicacy, her affable treatment of others, the accuracy of her judgements, the firmness of her decisions, and all of the nuances of her personality reflected the unique qualities of this crystal – some of which are even apparently contradictory: brilliance, refinement, and rigidity along with flexibility and subtlety.

She maintained this way of being even in the midst of life's difficulties and tempests. While she rarely took the deliberation of cutting off contact with someone, she was unwavering, would not give in, step back, or yield. She would not create a clash, but she would advance.

This leads us to conjecture that her Guardian Angel must have been an Angel with an altogether sublime sweetness and firmness. Firm in sweetness to the extreme, sweet in firmness to the extreme! He would have been an Angel filled with mercy, gentleness, and a willingness to heed all requests, able to plumb their depths and capable of the extremes of compassion; but also an Angel of great discernment: what is true is true, what is wrong is wrong, what is good is good, what is bad is bad.

### ***Harmonious equilibrium***

This richness, which encompassed such contrasting qualities, can only be

explained by the fact that Dona Lucilia had an essential aspect of equilibrium, which constituted the physiognomy of her soul. God, who does not see just specific attitudes, but also looks at their source, certainly considered her in this way.

Dona Lucilia lived, so to speak, within a glass dome, guarding all of her faculties from agitation, with neither the tedium of idleness nor useless anguish, like the petals of a flower that do not compete with one another for space, but act as sisters adorning the corolla.

Thus, she acted with entire ease within a myriad of events and, depending on the circumstance, was sagacious, sweet, amiable, courageous, prudent...

Even more beautiful than the eminent acts of virtue that she practised was her soul's harmony, which aided her in maintaining this state of balance. ✧

Taken, with adaptations,  
from: *Dona Lucilia*.  
Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV;  
Heralds of the Gospel,  
2013, p.410-414

**“Baccarat” crystal, strong, but with a certain flexibility, could serve as an apt symbol of this lady**

At right, a “Baccarat” crystal goblet; previous page, Dona Lucilia in May of 1941





# A Million People Have

With the ceremonies held in September and October, the total number of people who have consecrated themselves to Jesus by the hands of Mary through the course offered free of charge by the Reconquista Catholic Formation Platform of the Heralds of the Gospel has exceeded one million!

In Brazil and Portugal, the course was given by Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP, and the in-person ceremonies took place in the city of Braga, in Portugal; for Brazil, in the following cities: Caieiras, Cotia, São Carlos and Ubatuba, in São Paulo; Rio de Janeiro, Campos dos Goytacazes, Itaperuna and Nova Friburgo, in Rio de Janeiro; Maringá, Piraquara and Ponta Grossa, in Paraná; Belo Horizonte, Juiz de Fora and Mon-



Maringá (PR)

Maria Fernanda Aguiar



Rio de Janeiro

Paula de Azeite



Guatemala



Ubatuba (SP)

David Domingos



Caieiras (SP)



Nova Friburgo (RJ)

José Ribeiro



Teresina (PI)

Wynne Orlazzo



Joinville (SC)

Maryellen Oliveira



# Consecrated Themselves to Our Lady

tes Claros, in Minas Gerais; Belém and Castanhal, in Pará; Brasília, Manaus, Teresina, Camocim (CE), Moreno (PE), Lauro de Freitas (BA), Cariacica (ES), Cuiabá, Campo Grande and Joinville (SC).

For the Spanish-speaking countries, the classes were given by Fr. Manuel Rodriguez Sancho, EP. There were in-person ceremonies in Spain, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and in five cities in Colombia: Bogotá, Medellín, Tocancipá, Bucaramanga and El Retiro.

The consecration course in English began On September 27, given by Fr. Michael Carlson, EP.



El Salvador

Roberto Hernandez



Tocancipá (Colombia)

David Bedoya



Roberto Salas



Josao Paulo Rodrigues



Kenny Sanchez

Mexico



Pablo Diaz

Uruguay



Xavier Jabob

Paraguay



Pablo Vela

Argentina



Ricardo Jose Celli

Ecuador



Paulo Pirollo

Portugal

Photos: Eduardo de Barros



1



2



3

Vanessa Cravo

**Brazil** – On September 17, the Heralds of the Gospel of Lauro de Freitas, Bahia, received Cardinal Sérgio da Rocha, Archbishop of Salvador and Primate of Brazil, for a Eucharistic Celebration (photos 1 and 2). And on the 27th of the same month, Cardinal Orani João Tempesta, OCist, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, visited the house of the Heralds in the capital of that state, where he also celebrated Holy Mass (photo 3).

Photos: Jesse Arce



**Colombia** – Nearly two thousand people attended the Holy Mass in honour of Our Lady of Fatima on the occasion of the anniversary of her last apparition in Cova da Iria. The ceremony was held on October 13 at Colombia's Primate Cathedral in Bogota.

Photos: Urbano Ngoka



**Mozambique** – On the occasion of the liturgical remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi, patron Saint of the province of Zambézia, well-attended religious celebrations are held in the country. One of them took place on October 9, in the Quasi-Parish of St. Joseph in Matola-Gare, Diocese of Maputo.

# Oratory Inaugurated in Medellin

**O**n October 3, the Oratory of Our Lady of the Reconquest was inaugurated in Medellin, Colombia. Most Rev. Fidel León Cadavid Marín, Bishop of Sonsón-Rionegro, presided over the Mass of dedication of the altar, concelebrated by priests of the local clergy and the Heralds of the Gospel.

The photos below offer some views of the ceremony, including scenes of the blessing of the water, the illumination of the altar, the offerings procession and the moment of the Consecration. The choir of the Colombian Heralds of the Gospel provided the liturgical music for the celebration.



Photos: Andrés Upeguá



## ***Tomb of St. Nicholas found***

On the southern coast of Turkey, a team of archaeologists has found the tomb of St. Nicholas of Bari, the fourth-century bishop who, through his charity in the exercise of his ministry, became known throughout the world as the one who gives gifts to children on Christmas Eve.

Although it was known that the holy bishop had been buried in the church later dedicated to him in the city of Demre, in the Turkish province of Antalya, the exact site of his burial was unknown, since a large part of his remains were stolen in the 11th century and a new church was built over the original temple, submerged by a rise in the Mediterranean Sea.

Now investigators have discovered traces of the first building and the very ground on which St. Nicholas walked.



## ***More than two million faithful participate in the Círio de Nazaré***

Considered one of the largest religious festivals in Brazil and the world, and declared by UNESCO

since 2014 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the procession of the Círio of Our Lady of Nazaré has not been held for two years because of Covid-19. Resumed this year on October 9, it brought together more than 2.5 million pilgrims, according to figures published by the Secretariat of Public Security of the State of Pará.

The procession started at the Cathedral of Belém, after the Mass celebrated by Metropolitan Archbishop Alberto Taveira Corrêa. For five hours, devotees walked the route of about 3.6 kilometres to reach the Basilica Shrine of Our Lady of Nazareth, erected on the site where the statue of this invocation was found in the year 1700.

## ***The Body of Christ recreated using the Holy Shroud***

On October 13, the exhibition *The Mysterious Man* opened in the Cathedral of Salamanca, Spain. It presents the impressive story and details about the Shroud of Turin, as well as pieces that recreate instruments used in the Passion and even settings related to it, such as the Holy Sepulchre.

The main exhibit piece is a figure of Our Lord Jesus Christ, recreated on the basis of studies on the Shroud. It is a representation of the Sacred Body of Jesus at the moment He was buried, on which some signs of the Passion can be seen, such as the two hundred and fifty wounds caused by the scourging, a dislocated shoulder, a leg contracted by the rupture of a tendon, the marks of the nails in the feet and wrists, the opening in the side made by Longinus' lance, and the back of the head pierced by the crown of thorns.

## ***French paratroopers pay homage to St. Michael***

On October 15, dozens of French paratroopers, including war veterans, performed a march in defence of St.

Michael in the town of Sables-d'Ornonnes in western France.

The soldiers gathered at the square dedicated to the Archangel and, in front of the statue that presides over it, paid homage to him and sang the paratrooper's prayer, demonstrating by a peaceful protest their nonconformity with a court decision that has ordered the statue's removal from the site.

In November 2021, the anti-clerical Federation of Free Thought requested this measure on the grounds that the presence of the statue of St. Michael in a public place violates the secularity of the state.

The city mayor, Yannick Moreau, and a large part of the population oppose the decision, arguing, among other reasons, that the statue is part of the city's historical and cultural heritage.



## ***Seven million flowers for the Virgin of the Pillar***

On October 12, thousands of devotees of Our Lady of the Pillar gathered in the square in front her basilica in Zaragoza, Spain, for the traditional floral offering to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This year, the statue was honoured with more than seven million flowers, including those dropped by the Spanish Air Force in a flyby over the site.

Devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar dates back to the year 40, when St. James the Greater preached the Gospel in Spanish lands. Coming in mortal flesh from Jerusalem, the Blessed Virgin appeared to the Apostle on a stone column, the same one

that still stands today in the sanctuary, and asked him to build a church on the site, promising that She would remain there until the end of time to intercede for those who would have recourse to Her.

### ***Children around the world unite to pray the Rosary***

Eight hundred and forty thousand children from one hundred and forty countries signed up for the 17th edition of the *One Million Children Pray the Rosary* campaign, promoted by the Pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need.

The children united in prayer on October 18, and the countries with the greatest participation were: Poland – with 30% of the enrolments –, Slovakia, Philippines, Australia and India. But the initiative was also supported by children from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Laos and Myanmar, where Christians are a minority or even suffer persecution.

### ***Persecution of the clergy in Mexico***

At least seventy priests, according to official figures, have been murdered in Mexico since 1990. In many cases, the bodies were found beheaded, mutilated and with signs of torture or satanic messages. During the same period, there has also been

an increase in the number of desecrations of churches and the Blessed Sacrament. According to denunciations by local clergy, members of organized crime groups perpetrate such acts in order to be promoted within their internal ranks.

This growing persecution has turned Mexico into one of the most dangerous countries in the world for priests.



### ***Perpetual Adoration in England for vocations***

St. Joseph's Church, located in Stockport, England, was elevated to a Eucharistic Shrine of Perpetual Adoration on October 22, with the specific purpose of praying for new priestly vocations and the sanctification of the clergy.

The Mass to inaugurate the shrine was presided over by Bishop Mark Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury, who during his homily emphasized the importance of priests making the Eucharist the centre of their lives.

### ***Five-hundredth anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines***

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, in partnership with the country's Central Bank, issued coins commemorating the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in those lands. One side of the coin depicts the first Easter Mass celebrated in Limasawa Island, and on the other side the official logo of the anniversary.

The Catholic Faith was introduced to the Philippines in 1521, with the expedition of the Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan. Decades later, with the arrival of the Spanish, Catholicism became the predominant religion in the country.

### ***Hatred against Catholics increases by 260% in Canada***

According to the Canadian government statistics agency, manifestations of hatred against the Catholic Church in the country increased by 260% in just one year. The study compared the years 2020 and 2021, counting the number of total or partial burnings of churches, oratories and chapels, acts of vandalism, desecrations and threats against clerics and faithful.

The increase in anti-Catholic acts came mainly after the biased and distorted reportage on the discovery of graves in boarding schools run by the Catholic Church in Canada.



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# A Good Mother... and an Apple!

The two boys eagerly explained the entire history of the orchard in great detail. Just then, the Child stretched out his little hands: He wanted to pick an apple!



✦ Renata Souza

**A**pples! Apples! Beautiful red apples! Of every size, large, medium and small! Sweet and crisp! Beautiful red apples! Apples!” cried Lucas.

Poor fellow! He spoke of the beauty of his apples without ever having seen them, for he was blind from birth. Years ago, he had enjoyed the collaboration of his brothers in this humble occupation, since the orchard was part of the paternal inheritance. But each of them had eventually followed a different path in life, and now it was his wife and two sons who helped him.

The business was not very profitable, it is true, but it brought in enough for the family to live on. His sons, Ozias and Abiud, were sturdy young boys and willingly did their part. Naomi, the matron, who admired her husband’s character and virtue, shouldered as much as she could in the running of the household, and was an expert in making ends meet.

Theirs was a modest existence, but one rooted in a deep faith in the Lord God of Israel and in ardent hope for the coming of the Messiah.

\* \* \*

Let us turn our attention to another family: a father, a Mother and little Child. They were fleeing from their homeland to Egypt, a long and arduous journey...

The route took them almost entirely through desert terrain. And that day, it was unbearably hot! But even worse, the scanty food reserves had been depleted, and the remaining water was hot and clouded with dust.

Joseph went ahead, leading the donkey, on which Mary sat, holding her Baby. No matter how She tried to soothe Him and protect Him from the sun, the Child would sooner or later begin to feel thirsty... And that is what happened. As time

passed, little Jesus’ face became redder and redder, until finally He began to cry.

“Mary, how wish there was something I could do to remedy the situation...” lamented Joseph.

“My husband, do not be disheartened. If misfortune has befallen us, God knows our needs. Let us trust and He will help us!”

But the Child’s cries continued to pierce the couple’s hearts. On they went, praying to the Eternal Father.

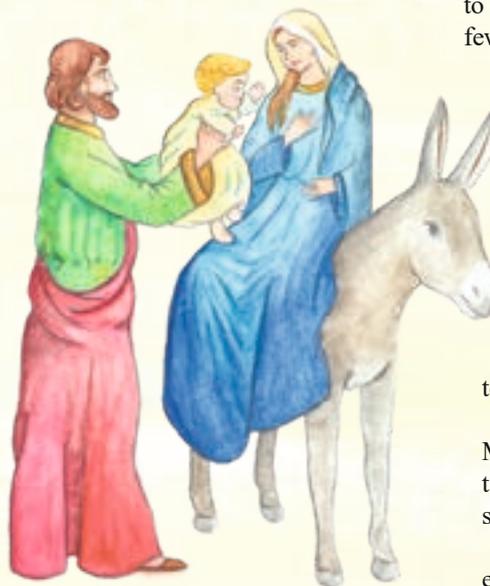
Presently their surroundings began to change: greenery reappeared, a few flowers could be seen and, best of all, they found fresh water to drink. Their faith had not been disappointed, for God had delivered them from that affliction! But they still had a long way to go...

At dusk, Joseph said:

“My Spouse, we are not far from a village. Shall we stop there and ask some good people to give us lodging?”

When the question reached Mary’s ears, she felt in her Heart that it would be for the best, and she simply answered yes.

Entering the village, Joseph wanted nothing other than to be guided by the preference of his Most Holy Spouse. So what did he do? Coming to the first house, he looked at Mary,



**“My Spouse, we are not far from a village. Shall we stop there and ask some good people to give us lodging?”**

and She, by her gaze, discreetly indicated that it was not the right place.

After six attempts, She showed her approval. The last rays of the sun were just bidding farewell to the sky.

Tap-tap-tap! Joseph knocked at the door.

“Yes? How can I help?” asked the lady of the house.

“Excuse me, my good lady, for the unexpectedness of our visit. We are travelling from Israel to Egypt, and need a place to stay for the night. Would you be able to give us shelter?”

The woman was Naomi, whom we have already met. At first she hesitated, not out of lack of goodwill, but because of the meagre conditions of her household: she would have no bed to offer, nor even enough food. But before she could begin to explain her difficulties, she caught sight of the Child... and immediately changed her mind!

“O blessed couple! What a beautiful Son you have! We are very lacking indeed, but I will find a way to accommodate you. Please come in! Our house is yours. I will call my husband.”

“May the Lord reward you, good lady!” Mary thanked her with a sincere smile.

Soon Lucas, Ozias and Abiud came. Everyone immediately liked the Holy Family and joyfully welcomed them.

The father gave the orders: “Children, you will sleep with your parents tonight, leaving the rest of the house for our guests.” The six ate a delicious soup prepared by Naomi and Mary, and everyone slept soundly.

The next morning, Lucas and Naomi could not bear to part with such blessed company. At their entreaties, Mary asked Joseph to spend one more day there, to which he readily agreed.



**The two little boys wanted to show the family orchard and the fine apples growing there**

The two little boys wanted to show the family orchard and the fine apples growing there. While St. Joseph conversed with the parents, Our Lady, carrying the Divine Child, followed Ozias and Abiud to the trees. The boys eagerly explained to Her the entire history of the orchard, and described every aspect of the cultivation and selling of the fruit.

Just then, the Baby Jesus stretched out His little hands: He wanted to pick an apple. The Blessed Virgin then said to the children:

“Would you kindly bring me a knife?”

“Yes, of course!” And they both ran to fetch one.

Mary cut and peeled a little piece of apple and gave it to her Son, who ate it with delight! At that moment, a cry was heard:

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Naomi dear, I can see! Blessed be God! Hosanna in the highest!”

The family of Lucas gathered around him, as he wept for joy. They wondering what could be the cause of such a miracle. Joseph and Mary smiled and said nothing, while the Child savoured another piece of apple...

Abiud then said:

“Mama, it was at the exact moment when Jesus tasted the apple that Papa began to shout that he could see.”

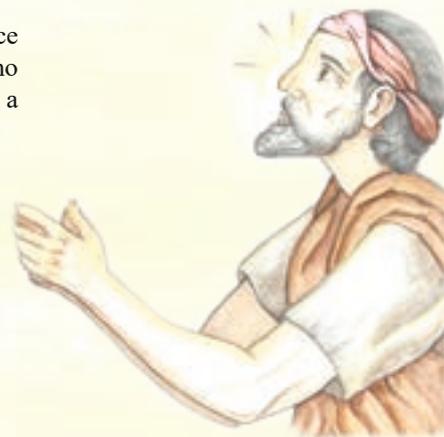
Lucas, deeply moved, knelt before the Child in His Mother’s arms. Seized by divine inspiration, he said with all the fervour of his soul:

“O Most High Lord, could it be that I am kneeling before the Messiah? Has the Desire of all Nations come to my humble home to visit my family? Has

my sight been granted to me today so that I might contemplate Him with my own eyes?”

With these and other words, the cured man praised the King of the universe. He had acquired material vision, but his faith allowed him see even further and believe that the little Child before him was the promised Christ.

Seeing the boundless gratitude of the former blind man, the Child Jesus pointed to His Mother. With this He wanted to signify that the miracle had been worked through the discreet intercession of Our Lady, the treasurer of the gifts of Heaven, in whose mouth “apple” of Adam never entered. ✧



Illustrations: Lucilia Bernadete Guarany

**Lucas had gained material vision, but his faith allowed him see even further and believe that this little Child was the Messiah**

# THE SAINTS OF EACH DAY

1. **St. Florence**, virgin (†fourth century). She was converted by St. Hilary of Poitiers during his exile in Asia Minor and accompanied him on his return to France, becoming an anchoress in Comblé.

2. **St. Silverius**, Pope and martyr (†537). For refusing to reinstate the heretical Bishop Anthimus to the see of Constantinople, he was exiled by the Empress Theodora to the Island of Palmarola, Italy, where he died of starvation.

3. **St. Francis Xavier**, priest (†1552 Shangchuan - China).

**Blessed John Nepomuk Tschiderer**, bishop (†1860). Prelate of Trent, Italy, who in difficult times offered an admirable witness of charity to the faithful entrusted to him.

## 4. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent.

**St. John Damascene**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†c. 749 Mar Saba - Israel).

**St. John Calabria**, priest (†1954). He founded the Congregation of the Poor Servants of Divine Providence in Verona, Italy.

5. **St. Sabbas**, abbot (†532). Born in Cappadocia, present-day Turkey, he instituted in Judea a new style of hermitical life, in monasteries called lauras.

6. **St. Nicholas**, bishop (†fourth century Myra - Turkey).

**St. Obitius**, religious (†1204). He abandoned his military career after a vision of hell convinced him of the vanity of the world, and he became a Benedictine oblate at the Monastery of Santa Giulia in Brescia, Italy.

7. **St. Ambrose**, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†397 Milan - Italy).



**St. Nicholas - Church of the Holy Christ, Ciudadela de Menorca (Spain)**

**St. Fara**, abbess (†657). Sister of St. Faro, Bishop of Meaux, and of St. Cagnoald, a monk in Luxeuil. She founded the Benedictine monastery of Faremoutiers, of which she was abbess for forty years.

## 8. Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**St. Patapius**, hermit (†fifth/sixth century). After living for several years as a hermit in the vicinity of Thebes, he moved to Constantinople, where he continued his life of austerity.

9. **St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatzín** (†1548 Mexico City).

**St. Leocadia**, virgin and martyr (†c. 304). For refusing to deny her Faith, she was tortured and then left to die in a dungeon.

## 10. Our Lady of Loreto.

**St. Luke of Isola**, bishop (†1114). He tirelessly dedicated himself to the poor of his Diocese

of Isola di Capo Rizzuto, Italy, and to the formation of monks.

## 11. 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday).

**St. Damasus I**, Pope (†384 Rome).

**Blessed Maria del Pilar Villalonga Villalba**, virgin and martyr (†1936). Laywoman of a deep spiritual life, she was arrested and shot during the religious persecution near Valencia, Spain.

12. **Our Lady of Guadalupe**, Patroness of the Americas.

**Blessed James Capocci**, bishop (†1308). Augustinian religious named Archbishop of Benevento and later of Naples, Italy. He was noted for his wisdom, prudence and theological knowledge.

13. **St. Lucy**, virgin and martyr (†c. 304/305 Syracuse - Italy).

**Blessed Maria Maddalena of the Passion**, virgin (†1921). Foundress of the Congregation of the Compassionist Sisters Servants of Mary, in Castellammare di Stabia, Italy.

14. **St. John of the Cross**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†1591 Úbeda - Spain).

**Sts. Heron, Arsenius, Isidore and Dioscurus**, martyrs (†250). Sentenced to death in Alexandria, Egypt, during the persecution of Decius. Seeing the first three suffer various tortures with the same constancy in the Faith, the judge had them thrown into a furnace; St. Dioscurus, only twelve years old, died after being subjected to numerous scourgings.

15. **Blessed Maria Victoria Fornari Strata**, religious (†1617). She founded the Order of the Most Holy Annunciation in Genoa, Italy.

**16. Blessed Sebastian Maggi**, priest (†1496). Dominican religious, he preached the Gospel in the region of Genoa, Italy, and was a promoter of regular observance in the religious houses of his Order.

**17. St. Begga**, abbess (†693). A noble widow of French origin, she founded the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Andenne, Belgium.

## 18. 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent.

**St. Flannán**, bishop (†seventh century). Youth from the royal family, he embraced religious life and was appointed Bishop of Kilaloe, Ireland.

**19. Blessed William of Fenoli**, religious (†c. 1200). One of the first Carthusian monks of Casotto, Italy, where he lived as a lay brother.

**20. St. Zephyrinus**, Pope (†217/218). He governed the Church for eighteen years, with the deacon St. Callistus as his auxiliary. His pontificate was marked by the struggle against the Trinitarian heresies.

**21. St. Peter Canisius**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†1597 Fribourg - Switzerland).

**Blessed Peter Friedhofen**, religious (†1860). A manual worker from Koblenz, Germany, he dedicated himself to the service of the sick and later founded the Congregation of the Brothers of Mercy of Mary Help of Christians.

**22. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini**, virgin (†1917). Foundress of the Institute of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Of Italian origin, she died in the United States, where she had dedicated

herself with outstanding charity to the care of immigrants.

**23. St. John Cantius**, priest (†1473 Krakow - Poland).

**St. Servulus the Paralysed** (†c. 590). Paralysed since childhood, he begged for alms on the porch of a church in Rome and shared what he collected with his fellow beggars.

**24. St. Tarsilla**, virgin (†sixth century). Aunt of St. Gregory the Great, who praised her exemplary life of prayer, recollection and penance.

## 25. Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. Anastasia**, martyr (†c. 304). She suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Diocletian, in Sirmium of Pannonia, in present-day Serbia. Her name is mentioned in the Roman Canon.



**St. Anastasia**

**26. St. Stephen**, deacon and protomartyr.

**Blesseds Agnes Phila, Lucie Khambang and companions**, martyrs (†1940). For refusing to deny their Catholic Faith, they were shot at the cemetery in Song-Khon, Thailand.

**27. St. John**, Apostle and Evangelist.

**St. Theodorus**, priest and martyr (†c. 841). Monk of the Laura of St. Sabbas in Palestine, arrested and tortured in Constantinople by the iconoclasts. He died in prison in Apamea in Bithynia, present-day Turkey.

**28. Holy Innocents**, martyrs.

**Blessed Matthia Nazarei**, abbess (†c. 1326). From a noble family in Matelica, Italy, at the age of eighteen she fled her home and entered the Convent of Santa Maddalena.

**29. St. Thomas Becket**, bishop and martyr (†1170 Canterbury - England).

**St. David**, king and prophet. Son of Jesse of Bethlehem, he was chosen by God to reign over Israel. From his lineage the Saviour was born.

**30. The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.**

**St. Lorenzo of Frazzanò**, monk (†c. 1162). He led a monastic life according to the observance of the Eastern Fathers in Frazzanò, Sicily.

**31. St. Sylvester I**, Pope (†335 Rome).

**St. Melania the Younger**, religious (†440). Daughter of an illustrious Roman family, in mutual agreement with her husband they embraced the religious life. She spent her fortune in works of charity.

# Innocent Preparation for Christmas

The combination of all the details, even the smallest, that make up the Christmas atmosphere pays tribute, in some way, to that blessed night that saw the birth of the long-awaited Redeemer in the Grotto of Bethlehem.



✦ Carolina Zandoná

**A**s Christmas celebrations draw near, the gazes of some of the people with whom we fortuitously cross paths reveal a nostalgia, a spiritual thirst, a desire – perhaps subconscious – to rediscover the true meaning of Christmas.

In today's world, this festivity is presented under a wrapping of hustle and bustle, shopping, commercialism and gratification, which prevents its authentic and innocent joys from shining through. Instead of hearts turning to God Most High who came down to us, taking on poor mortal nature to save us, the world turns its attention to an idol: Mammon, the god of money. The customs with which each people relives the birth of Christ are increasingly massified by this universal idolatry, focused on all that is perishable, and oblivious to eternal values.

Very different are the riches of a society open to the light of God! In this sense, the Christmas traditions of Germany stand out. Generally seen as a philosophical and military na-

tion, at Christmas time, however, it is clothed with a delicacy of soul capable of interpreting “the sentiment of affection that should be awakened in someone who beholds a tender Child in the manger, with all the physical frailties of infancy, weeping and cold, but who is nevertheless truly God.”<sup>1</sup>

This perfect balance between combativeness and affectivity only fully blossoms in the truly Catholic soul, which knows how to admire the sublime and the marvellous that exist beyond the concrete world and which, for this reason, seeks to materially represent aspects of a beauty that does not exist on this earth, but which it desires because it was created for Heaven.

At the Saviour's Birth, we did not receive just any gift from the eternal abodes; the Creator of Paradise himself came to dwell with us. Mankind spent millennia waiting and preparing for this event, and over the centuries, through the liturgical season of Advent, the Holy Church revivifies this joyful hope.

In the temporal sphere, a German tradition, refined over the decades, expresses this expectation in a charming way: a calendar to mark the days leading up to Christmas. In its most elaborate version, the Advent calendar presents a series of little windows to be opened each day, disclosing a religious symbol or a Christmas allegory hidden behind them.

In some cities, the setting is transposed to the façade of famous buildings, attracting the attention of passers-by during those weeks. In this way the faithful innocently prepare for Christmas, placing themselves in the perspective of the event that will be relived on the night between December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, and children, especially, temper their exuberant eagerness for the coming of the great day.

The illustrations behind each little window generally resemble the images evoked by German Christmas carols: “[A] little town covered with snow, the white cone-shaped roofs, the little brown houses; everything seems to be made of gingerbread to be

eaten. And a little church, as if made of marzipan, [...] the path leading to the church, somewhat meandering [...]; the bell that rings at a specific time and the families that appear all bundled up – each individual looking like a ball of wool –, little children walking in single file, carrying lanterns [...]. The feathery snowflakes fall without the slightest sound. An immense and recollected silence, of a sacred night, in which the entire world

ponders the silence that surrounded the grotto and the manger.”<sup>2</sup>

This Advent, let us resolve to make a similar calendar ourselves. However, it is not necessary to have it – whether printed or carefully homemade – in paper form, but rather, above all, to carry it in our hearts.

Each day let us try to detach ourselves from our selfishness and from the passing things of this world, and let us open a new space in our souls

so that the Blessed Virgin can place something wonderful there that will bring us closer to Paradise, bringing a smile to the Child Jesus, whose birth will soon mystically take place. ✧

<sup>1</sup> CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conferência*. São Paulo, 3/1/1989.

<sup>2</sup> CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Stille Nacht*. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XIII. N.153 (Dec., 2010); p.33.

Photos: Reproduction



Two examples of Advent calendars

The City Hall of Gengenbach (Germany), decorated as an Advent calendar



Andreas Schwarzkopf (CC by-sa 3.0)

## *Friend of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Guardian of the Virgin*

*St. John the Evangelist was an eminently virginal soul, extraordinarily close to Our Lord, and most devoted to His Sacred Heart.*

*More than an Apostle, he was a true friend of the God-Man. That is why Our Lord, before dying on the Wood, left to His beloved disciple an inestimable treasure: Mary Most Holy.*

*To receive Our Lady is to receive all that God can grant to man, after having given Himself. The Virgin Mary was given by the virginal Son to the virginal friend who was St. John. In this consignment we see an extraordinary manifestation of God's love for virginal souls. And we also see one of the luminous features of the greatness of this Apostle Evangelist.*

*Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira*

St. John the Evangelist -  
Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris