

## **Calendars**

We've had some communication problems with passing out our annual calendars, so perhaps you've already picked one up, or perhaps not. But they are certainly available now for pick-up at the Gathering Space doors. If you think about it, a calendar which incorporates the Church calendar is an important thing. The ways we calculate times and season are somewhat arbitrary. If you ask the Jews, we're living in the year 5775 and there are twelve months in the year (divided differently than our calendar) with an occasional "leap month" instead of a "leap day." On the other hand, if you ask the Muslims, the year is 1436 (they count from the year Mohammad moved from Mecca to Modina). Of course, the most widely used calendar is the Gregorian calendar—which we use—and which speaks to the influence that Rome, Catholicism, and the West have had on the world. Even so, the most important calendar for us should be the Church calendar, a.k.a. the Roman calendar. Luckily, this synchronizes perfectly with the Gregorian, but it isn't the same. After all, we start our new year in Advent, around the end of November or beginning of December. And while we're all grateful for the Gregorian calendar, it should really be the Roman calendar that is most important for us. It is the season of Advent, Christmas, etc., and the annual celebrations of the Immaculate Conception, St. Nicholas, and all the Saints that should really dictate the routine in which we, as Catholics, live our lives. And so let us use our new calendars well to remind us each and every day of the year about Jesus Christ, Lord of time and history. And let us also give a word of thanks to our Knights of Columbus Council who sponsor our calendars every year. Thanks gentlemen!

### **Happy Liturgical New Year!**

Advent—from the Latin word for "coming" or "arrival"—is when we meditate upon the two comings of Jesus Christ: His first coming in humility on the first Christmas, and His Second Coming in glory, which we still await. During the Advent season the Advent Wreath provides a wonderful focal point for family meal-time prayer to help us prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, our Savior. So, I thought I'd give you some resources to help you use your Advent Wreath as part of meal-time prayers. Below is a prayer of blessing for the Advent Wreath, as well as daily meal-time prayers. The idea is to read a Scripture passage each evening before dinner and then offer the prayer along with your family's regular meal prayers. Please feel free to cut this page out of the bulletin and keep it at the dinner table.

An Advent wreath is made of sprigs of evergreen (a symbol of eternity) with four candles that are lighted successively in the weeks of Advent to symbolize the light of our Savior who will dispel the darkness of the world. Three of the candles are purple, to represent our penitential prayer of waiting and eager expectation. A rose-colored candle (the color of the sky at dawn) marks the Third Sunday of Advent as a time to rejoice over the closeness of the coming of Christ at Christmas and the dawning of the new day of salvation.

### **BLESSING OF THE ADVENT WREATH**

Before the Advent wreath is lit for the first time, a prayer of blessing may be said over it. This blessing would normally take place at the Saturday evening meal before the first Sunday of Advent and be led by the head of the household who also then would lead the daily prayers.

**Leader:** Our help is in the name of the Lord.

**All:** Who made heaven and earth.

**Leader:** O God, by whose Word all things are sanctified, pour forth Your blessing upon this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from You abundant graces. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

*The wreath may then be sprinkled with holy water while all make the sign of the cross. (The sign of the cross is not made over the wreath, as this form of blessing is reserved to a priest or deacon.) The prayers for each week come from the Opening Prayers of the Mass for the Sundays of Advent.*

### **DAILY ADVENT MEALTIME PRAYERS AND SCRIPTURE READINGS**

#### First Week

Sun. Romans 13:11-12  
Mon. Isaiah 2: 3-4  
Tues. Philippians 3: 20-21  
Wed. Isaiah 7:10-15  
Thur. James 5: 7-11  
Fri. Jeremiah 30: 21-22  
Sat. Isaiah 11: 1-5

#### Third Week

Sun. Luke 1: 41-45  
Mon. Isaiah 29: 18-19  
Tues. Isaiah 30: 18-20  
Wed. Luke 1: 72-75  
Thur. Jeremiah 22: 5-6  
Fri. Luke 1: 76-79  
Sat. Ezekiel 34: 15-16

#### Second Week

Sun. Luke 1: 30-33  
Mon. Isaiah 45:8  
Tues. 2 Peter 3: 8-9  
Wed. Isaiah 10:20-21  
Thur. 1Cor 1: 8-9  
Fri. Genesis 49: 8-10  
Sat. Isaiah 11:10

#### Fourth Week

Sun. Luke 1: 34-35  
Mon. Isaiah 61:11  
Tues. Luke 1: 46-55  
Wed. Malachi 3:1  
Thur. Mark 1: 7-8  
Fri. Isaiah 7: 14-15  
Sat. Isaiah 40: 3-5

**FIRST WEEK** *This Sunday used to be called “Stirrup Sunday,” because the “stir-up” mentioned in the prayer was the signal to begin to “stir-up” the fruits for the baking of Christmas cakes and puddings. The prayer should be repeated each day during the first week. After the prayer, the family’s youngest child lights the first purple candle. (Family members can also take turns lighting and blowing out the candles on each night.)*

**Leader:** Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the dangers that beset us through our sins; and be a Redeemer to deliver us; You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

*Light candle; read daily Scripture; and then say meal-time Grace. The candle burns during evening meals for the first week.*

**SECOND WEEK** *The prayer that follows is to be repeated each day of the second week. After the prayer, the oldest child lights the first and second purple candles.*

**Leader:** Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the paths of Your Only-begotten Son: that we may worthily serve You with hearts purified by His coming: You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

*Light candles; read daily Scripture; and then say meal-time Grace. The two candles burn during the evening meals of the second week.*

**THIRD WEEK** *The joyful Sunday in Advent (known as “Gaudete”) is represented by a rose colored candle instead of the penitential purple. The mother of the family lights the rose colored candle, as well as the two previously burned purple candles, after the following prayer has been said.*

**Leader:** We beseech You to listen to our prayers, O Lord, and by the grace of Your coming enlighten our darkened minds: You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

*Light candles; read daily Scripture; and then say meal-time Grace. The three candles burn during the evening meals of the third week.*

**FOURTH WEEK** *The prayer that follows is to be repeated each day of the fourth week. After the prayer, the father lights all four candles.*

**Leader:** Pour forth Your power, O Lord, and come: Assist us by that mighty power, so that by Your grace and merciful kindness we may swiftly receive the salvation that our sins impede: You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

*Light candles; read daily Scripture; and then say meal-time Grace. The four candles burn during the evening meals of the fourth week.*

With the coming of Christmas Eve, the penitential season of Advent is over and the time to rejoice is at hand. The Advent wreath may now be transformed into a Christmas wreath and the purple and pink candles exchanged for white or red candles.

### **My Favorite Advent Practice**

As we try to prepare in our daily life for the coming of Christ—spiritually, sacramentally, or visibly—I thought I’d share with you my family’s tradition for Advent. Growing up, Mom always had us make ‘Advent cards’ at the beginning of the season. Each day, we were supposed to try and find some extra-kind or extra-penitential things to do to prepare for the Baby Jesus. We would write each of these special sacrifices in the card each day. I have to admit that most of mine when I was younger were things like, “Didn’t hit my sister,” “Didn’t call my sister a name.” Remember when life was that simple?

Anyway, as motivation to do these good deeds, we also had an empty manger which was for the Baby Jesus. For each good thing we wrote in our card, we were allowed to put one piece of ‘hay’ in the manger (it was really yellow yarn that my Mom had cut up). If we thought about the Baby Jesus as much as we should during Advent, then by Christmas morning, the manger was heaped with straw to make a nice, comfortable bed wherein Jesus could lie down. It may be too late for your family to start such a practice this Advent, and perhaps you already have your own family tradition. But if you’re looking for a good one, I recommend this one for next year. I will always have fond memories and good motivation to keep the spirit of preparation during Advent

because of it.

### **Celebrating the Immaculate Conception**

Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, is a Holy Day of Obligation in honor of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception. While most holy days will lose their obligatory character if they land on a Monday or a Saturday, Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> doesn't because Holy Mary is the Patroness of the U.S.A. under the title of the Immaculate Conception. So, I invite us all to celebrate and pray on Monday as a parish by all praying together, in our homes, this prayer of consecration from the U.S. Bishops:

Most Holy Trinity: Our Father in Heaven, Who chose Mary as the fairest of Your daughters; Holy Spirit, Who chose Mary as Your spouse; God the Son, Who chose Mary as Your mother; in union with Mary, we adore Your majesty and acknowledge Your supreme, eternal dominion and authority.

Most Holy Trinity, we put the United States of America into the hands of Mary immaculate in order that she may present the country to You. Through her we wish to thank You for the great resources of this land and for the freedom, which has been its heritage. Through the intercession of Mary, have mercy on the Catholic Church in America. Grant us peace. Have mercy on our president and on all the officers of our government. Grant us a fruitful economy born of justice and charity. Have mercy on capital and industry and labor. Protect the family life of the nation. Guard the precious gift of many religious vocations. Through the intercession of our mother, have mercy on the sick, the poor, the tempted, sinners – on all who are in need.

Mary, immaculate virgin, our mother, patroness of our land, we praise you and honor you and give our country and ourselves to your sorrowful and immaculate heart. O sorrowful and immaculate heart of Mary pierced by the sword of sorrow prophesized by Simeon save us from degeneration, disaster and war. Protect us from all harm. O sorrowful and immaculate heart of Mary, you who bore the sufferings of your Son in the depths of your heart, be our advocate. Pray for us, that acting always according to your will and the will of your Divine Son, we may live and die pleasing to God. Amen.

### **The Great Shift**

Happy Gaudete Sunday! The third Sunday in Advent is a day of special rejoicing (that's what "gaudete" means) because we're half way through this season of preparation. Beginning this week, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, there is a great shift that occurs in the focus of the season and the liturgy, that is, we begin to focus much more specifically on the remembrance of Jesus' Incarnation and birth at Christmas. To help you in your Advent prayers during this time, I thought I'd tell you a little about the "O Antiphons."

The last seven days of Advent, from December 17<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Church all over the world prays the "O Antiphons." They are used in the Gospel Alleluia at daily Mass and as a refrain during the Liturgy of the Hours at Vespers (Evening Prayer). You may also recognize them from the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," although that hymn begins with what is actually the last antiphon. During these last days of Advent, our longing for the coming of the foretold Christ child intensifies as we invoke these titles from the Old Testament that look forward to the

birth of our Savior.

These ancient antiphons of the Church may be added to your evening prayers around the family Advent wreath in order to add a mood of eager expectation that builds throughout the last seven days before Christmas Eve. The antiphons are shown here with the Latin title invoked at the end. The Old Testament Scriptures that each antiphon is based upon are also referenced.

- Dec. 17 O WISDOM**, Who came from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly: COME, and teach us the way of prudence. Come “O Sapientia.” Amen. (Sirach 24:2; Wisdom 8:1)
- Dec. 18 O LORD AND RULER** of the House of Israel, Who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the Law on Sinai: COME, and redeem us with outstretched arms. Come “O Adonai.” Amen. (Exodus 3:2; 20:1)
- Dec. 19 O ROOT OF JESSE**, Which stands as a symbol of the people, before Whom the kings keep silence and unto Whom the Gentiles shall make supplication: COME, to deliver us, and tarry not. Come “O Radix Jesse.” Amen. (Isaiah 11:1-3)
- Dec. 20 O KEY OF DAVID**, and Scepter of the House of Israel, Who opens and no man shuts, Who shuts and no man opens: COME, and bring forth the captive from his prison, he who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death. Come “O Clavis David.” Amen. (Isaiah 22:22)
- Dec. 21 O DAWN OF THE EAST**, brightness of light eternal, and Sun of Justice: COME, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Come “O Oriens.” Amen. (Psalm 19:6-7)
- Dec. 22 O KING OF THE GENTILES** and their desired One, the Cornerstone that makes both one: COME, and deliver man, whom You formed out of the dust of the earth. Come “O Rex Gentium.” Amen. (Psalm 2:7-8; Ephesians 2:14-20)
- Dec. 23 O EMMANUEL**, God with us, Our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior: COME to save us, O Lord our God. Come “O Emmanuel.” Amen. (Isaiah 7:14; 33:22)

### **Merry Christmas Season!**

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! On behalf of myself, Fr. Norton, Dcn. Greg, Dcn. Rich, Sr. Armella, and all of the parish staff, thank you for your kind and generous Christmas cards and gifts! As we celebrate the season of Christmas (Dec. 25—Jan. 12 this year), I pray that we will be able to keep in our hearts the peace and joy that Jesus’ Incarnation gives us despite the busyness of the New Year and Christmas break. I encourage us as Catholics to truly celebrate Christmas as a season (rather than just a day) and not to throw out our trees or take down our decorations too soon. We ought to continue our celebration until either the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on Jan. 12 or (according to the old German tradition) Feb. 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

There are several liturgical and devotional ways of celebrating the Christmas Season. For example, celebrate today’s Feast of the Holy Family by spending quality time with family, or perhaps giving a call or writing a letter to a family member that we haven’t seen in a while. Then there’s the Solemnity of Epiphany—traditionally Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>, but Jan. 5<sup>th</sup> this year since in the U.S. we always transfer it to Sunday. This is the day when most of the world exchanges gifts

rather than on Christmas Day, remembering the gifts brought by the Magi. An old devotion and a fun one is to celebrate (and sing!) the Twelve Days of Christmas, which we are already in the midst of. If you like this tradition, here is a breakdown of the song's typology to help you reflect on all of God's gifts to us in Jesus Christ:

"On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me...." The "true love" mentioned in the song doesn't refer to an earthly suitor, but it refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person, i.e., the Church.

**1<sup>st</sup> Day:** The "partridge in a pear tree" is Christ Jesus upon the Cross. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge because she would feign injury to decoy a predator away from her nestlings. She was even willing to die for them. The tree is the symbol of the fall of the human race through the sin of Adam and Eve. It is also the symbol of its redemption by Jesus Christ on the tree of the Cross.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Day:** The "two turtle doves" refers to the Old and New Testaments.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Day:** The "three French hens" stand for faith, hope and love—the three gifts of the Spirit that abide (1 Corinthians 13).

**4<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "four calling birds" refers to the four evangelists who wrote the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—who sing the song of salvation about Jesus Christ.

**5<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "five golden rings" represents the first five books of the Bible, also called the Torah or the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

**6<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "six geese a-laying" are the six days of creation.

**7<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "seven swans a-swimming" refers to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

**8<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "eight maids a milking" reminded children of the eight beatitudes listed in the Sermon on the Mount.

**9<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "nine ladies dancing" were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

**10<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "ten lords a-leaping" represents the Ten Commandments.

**11<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "eleven pipers piping" refers to the eleven faithful apostles.

**12<sup>th</sup> Day:** The "twelve drummers drumming" were the twelve points of belief expressed in the Apostles' Creed: belief in 1.) God the Father and 2.) the Son, including that 3.) Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, 4.) suffered, died, and was buried, 5.) descended into Hell and arose on the third day, 6.) that He ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father and 7.) will come again as Judge; also in 8.) the Holy Spirit, 9.) the Church or Communion of Saints, 10.) the forgiveness of sins, 11.) the resurrection of the body, and 12.) life everlasting.

### **Happy Feast of the Holy Family!**

In the wake of the recent Extraordinary Synod on Marriage and the Family, and with the upcoming Ordinary Synod to continue that discussion, this annual feast takes on new importance. All of us have a family and all of us are always looking for ways to improve family life, both personally and for everyone. But, what is a healthy family supposed to look like?

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are the answer to that question—every family is not exactly like them, of course (in fact, no family is if you think about it), but every family should have God and love at the center of their lives just as they did.

### **Jan. 1: Holy Day of Obligation**

Please remember that Jan. 1, the eighth day of the Christmas Octave, is the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, and is a Holy Day of Obligation. All Marian Feast Days are special to our parish since we are dedicated to Our Lady, but this solemnity is the most important of all. All of Mary's special graces, virtues, and powers are due to this: that she is the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. After our patronal celebration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, this Jan. 1 celebration is our biggest opportunity to honor our Heavenly Mother and grow in our love for her.

### **Happy Epiphany!**

Traditionally, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord on Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>, but in the U.S. of A. we always transfer the celebration to Sunday—today! Even though we remember several moments in Our Lord's life today, the ancient Western celebration of Epiphany focuses on the visit of the Christ-child by the Three Magi as recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel. It is a tradition on this day to pray God's blessing upon our home. While we priests and deacons would, of course, love to come around and bless all of your houses—that is never going to happen in one day. Instead, we invite you to pray as a family for God's blessing on your own home, making use of holy water and blessed chalk. You may remember this from last year.

Here's what to do:

Hopefully you already have holy water at home. If not, don't worry: bring a bottle or jar anytime and fill it up from our holy water dispenser in the Gathering Space. Then, of course, you should have picked up your piece of blessed chalk after Mass today. What you are going to do—in the context of the below prayer service—is sprinkle the rooms of your house with holy water and write a symbolic blessing over the front door (or each door, if you prefer) of your house. The symbol is made by combining the numbers of the new year with the initials of the traditional names of the Three Wise Men: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. This year, it should look like this: 20 + C + M + B + 15. The three initials can also be thought of as an abbreviation for the Latin phrase, "*Christus mansionem benedicat*" which means "Christ bless this house."

*Rite for Blessing Homes during the Christmas Season:*

*The family gathers in a fitting place, if possible near the front door. The father of the family, or another suitable family member, acts as the leader. When all have gathered, a suitable song may be sung (e.g., "O Come, All Ye Faithful" or "We Three Kings"). The leader makes the sign of the cross, and all reply, "Amen."*

**Leader:** Let us praise God, who fills our hearts and homes with peace. Blessed be God forever.

**All:** Blessed be God forever.

**Leader:** The Word became flesh and made His dwelling place among us. It is Christ Who enlightens our hearts and homes with his love. May all who enter this home find Christ's light and love.

*One of those present or the leader reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example, Matthew 2:1-12*

*or Luke 19:1-9.*

**Leader:** The Son of God made His home among us. With thanks and praise let us call upon Him:

**R/.** Stay with us, Lord.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus Christ, with Mary and Joseph You formed the Holy Family: remain in our home, that we may know You as our guest and honor You as our Head. Let us pray:

**R/.** Stay with us, Lord.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus Christ, You had no place to lay Your head, but in the spirit of poverty accepted the hospitality of Your friends: grant that through our help the homeless may obtain proper housing. Let us pray:

**R/.** Stay with us, Lord.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus Christ, the three kings presented their gifts to You in praise and adoration: grant that those living in this house may use their talents and abilities to Your greater glory. Let us pray:

**R/.** Stay with us, Lord.

*After the intercessions, the formula 20 + C + M + B + 15 is marked with blessed chalk over the front door. The leader may pray the following traditional prayer:*

**Leader:** Hear us, O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, and send Your Holy Angel from Heaven to watch over, cherish, protect, be with, and defend all who live in my house. I call upon Your Saints, Casper, Melchior, and Balthasar, to protect my family and my home from every harm and danger, and I place the marks of their holy names over the doors of my home to remain there as a constant reminder to us and to all who enter here that my house is truly a house of the Lord.

O God, make the door of my house wide enough to receive all who need human love and companionship; narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children, nor to straying feet, but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power. O God, make the door of my house the gateway to Your eternal Kingdom. I ask these things in the Name of Jesus Christ Your Son.

**All:** Amen.

*The leader then sprinkles the rooms of the house with holy water. (If other doors are to be marked with the formula of blessing, that may also be done at this time.) During this process those not sprinkling may accompany the leader and pray the Magnificat (below) or the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.*

**Leader:** From the east came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures they offered precious gifts: gold for the great King, incense for the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial.

**All:**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior

For He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
The Almighty has done great things for me,  
And holy is His Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear Him  
In every generation.  
He has shown the strength of His arm,  
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
And has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
And the rich He has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of His servant Israel  
For He has remembered His promise of mercy,  
The promise He made to our fathers,  
To Abraham and his children for ever.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son  
And to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now,  
And will be forever. Amen.

**All:** From the east came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures they offered precious gifts: gold for the great King, incense for the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial.

*When the sprinkling is finished, all gather together again, and the leader invites the family to pray the Lord's Prayer.*

**All:** Our Father...

**Leader:** All they from Sheba shall come

**All:** Bearing gold and frankincense.

**Leader:** O Lord, hear my prayer.

**All:** And let my cry come to You.

**Leader:** Let us pray. O God, Who on this day revealed Your only-begotten Son to all nations by the guidance of a star, grant that we who now know You by faith may finally behold You in Your heavenly majesty. Through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** Be enlightened and shine forth, O Jerusalem, for your light is come; and upon you is risen the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary.

**All:** Nations shall walk in your light, and kings in the splendor of your birth, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

**Leader:** Let us pray. Lord God almighty, bless this home, and under its shelter let there be health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to Your commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May Your blessing remain

always in this home and on those who live here. Through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

*The leader concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:*

**Leader:** May Christ Jesus dwell with us, keep us from all harm, and make us one in mind and heart, now and forever.

**All:** Amen.

*It is preferable to end the celebration with another suitable song.*

(From: *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition*, with additions from the *Roman Ritual*, 1964.)

### **Renewing Our Baptism in Christ's Baptism**

This Sunday's feast of the Baptism of the Lord continues our Epiphany theme of God's revealing of Himself to us in Christ. By His Baptism, Jesus has formed the gateway through which God's grace can come back into our souls despite the Original Sin. We can never take this great grace of our Baptism seriously enough and should renew our baptismal vows often. We should also use holy water regularly as a sacramental and as a reminder of our Baptism. I encourage you on this Feast of the Lord's Baptism to renew now the vows of your own Baptism—reject Satan; profess your faith in Christ Jesus:

*Do you renounce Satan?*

*And all his works?*

*And all his empty show?*

*Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth?*

*Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?*

*Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?*

This is our faith; this is the faith of the Church—we are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

### **The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord**

This year Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, falls on a Sunday. It is on this day that we remember how, when the baby Jesus was consecrated in the Temple as Mary's firstborn son, the holy man Simeon took Him in his arms and prophesied, "Now, Lord, You may let Your servant go in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for Your people Israel" (Lk. 2:29-32). You may notice that this idea of revelation and light are themes closely connected to the Christmas Season and the Feast of Epiphany. In fact, the celebration of Christmas and Epiphany in the old liturgical calendar (before the liturgical reforms after Vatican II) didn't end until Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>. This theme of Christ as "a light for revelation" also became a reason for blessing candles on this feast day, and hence we also call Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> Candlemas.

Candles in the liturgy are always used as a reminder of the presence of Jesus Christ, Who is the

Light of the world (see Jn. 1:9; 8:12). This is why they are always used prominently around the Altar and the Tabernacle, including the always-burning, red sanctuary lamp. Although Jesus' presence in the Eucharist is the most profound and mysterious way in which He is present, He is present to us in the liturgy in many ways, which we also designate with candles. He is present when His Word is proclaimed, especially the Gospels, which is why we now have the servers take candles to the Ambo during the Gospel. He is also present in the assembly—"Where two or three are gathered in My Name" (Matt. 18:20)—which is why fully consecrated church buildings have twelve candles on the walls spread throughout the church and which are usually lit on important holy days. In fact, all of us receive a candle as a reminder of Christ's presence within us at our Baptism. This baptismal candle is lit off of the great Paschal Candle, the greatest of all candles and greatest symbol of Christ as the Light. Finally, it is Jesus Who leads us into and out of the Mass, and that is why many parishes have the practice of having two servers with candles accompany the processional cross.

We have invited you today to bring your personal candles to have them blessed. This helps us to bring the power of the Church's liturgy into our own family prayer, allowing our prayer life to flow from the prayer of the Church. It is always a good practice to light a candle when we gather together as a family to pray because then, as at Mass, Christ is present with us and enlightens us. It reminds us also that we are also called to be the light of the world (see Matt. 5:14-16) shining in the darkness. May Christ our Light be present to our minds each time we light our newly blessed candles and pray.

### **Palms to Ashes**

Hopefully you've still got all of your (now dried) palm leaves from last year's Palm Sunday. These sacramentals are intended to remind us throughout the year of the Paschal Mystery, i.e., the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ our Lord. Do you have them behind your crucifixes, over your bedstead, on your rear-view mirror? Wherever you keep your palm-leaf reminders, now is the time to collect them and return them to church. From tomorrow until the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, we will have jars at the entry way of the Gathering Space in which you may place your old palms. These palms will be burned in preparation for Ash Wednesday when we begin the journey again through Christ's Paschal Mystery in the symbolic, liturgical sense. All palm leaves, all symbols of victory, will come only to dust and ashes in this world. But through Christ's Resurrection (mystically symbolized by the phoenix) we will rise from our own ashes to the true victory of Heaven!

### **A Good Lenten Prayer**

During Lent, we are encouraged to spend time particularly meditating upon the passion and death of Our Lord on the cross. A good way of doing that is to focus on the crucifix after receiving Jesus Christ substantially in Holy Communion. Since Fridays are an especially important day during Lent, Mother Church reminds us that "A *plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful who on any of the Fridays of Lent devoutly recite after Communion the prayer My Good and Dear Jesus, I Kneel before You (*En ego, O bone et dulcissime Iesu*) before a crucifix" (*Handbook of Indulgences*, USCCB 2006, Grant 8). Even if you can't make it to Mass on

Fridays to receive this indulgence, this is still a wonderful prayer, and I encourage you to pray it throughout Lent:

*My good and dear Jesus, I kneel before You,  
asking You most earnestly to engrave upon my heart  
a deep and lively faith, hope and charity,  
with true repentance for my sins,  
and a firm resolve to make amends.  
As I reflect upon Your five wounds,  
and dwell upon them with deep compassion and grief,  
I recall, good Jesus, the words the prophet David spoke  
long ago concerning Yourself:  
they have pierced My hands and My feet,  
they have numbered all My bones.*

### **The 40 Days of Lent: the Spirit vs. the Letter of the Law on Penance**

I know people are always curious about whether the Sundays of Lent “count.” Most of us want to know, of course, because we want to break our fasting and penances on Sundays. That desire can be either pure or impure in my opinion, but let’s look real quick at the structure and history of Lent.

First we need to understand the Triduum. The Triduum, the three most sacred days of the year, is distinct from Lent in a way. Because “days” in liturgical reckoning run from sunset on the day before, the Triduum is defined as Holy Thursday evening (that’s why Mass is in the evening), Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. These days have their own character: Holy Thursday is a somewhat celebratory day, remembering the Institution of the Eucharist, and the Lenten Fast technically ends on Holy Thursday evening. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday (until the Easter Vigil), however, there is the “Paschal Fast” instead of the Lenten Fast—meaning we pray, fast, and give alms with even more zeal on those two days. But here’s the deal as far as counting the 40 days of Lent: even though the Triduum’s distinct from Lent and Easter Sunday is it’s end, Lent still claims Holy Thursday through Holy Saturday as part of its 40 days, although not Easter Sunday.

So, if you count from Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday, there are, in fact, 46 days in the Lenten Season. And guess what, there’re 6 Sundays in Lent. So, it is true that Sundays do not actually count. Sundays are like mini-Easters all year, even in Lent. In fact, the reading from the Liturgy of the Hours for every Sunday in Lent is the same, “Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep; for today is holy to our Lord. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!” (Neh. 8:9, 10).

One more thing needs to be said, however, which is that part of the reason the Church decided that Sundays are not penitential days stems from history. In the old days, when people did penance and fasted, it was really severe (kind of like what Fr. Andrew is always talking about). People would sometimes make themselves sick or hurt themselves because they wanted to do penance for their sins so much. So, the Church decided that if people didn’t have to abstain

from meat or fast on Sundays, then it would be healthier for people and keep them from harming themselves. That is pretty obviously not a problem anymore. What most of us give up are luxuries, not necessities.

So, here is my personal opinion. If you want Sunday off just because you can't imagine going the entire 40 days without sweets or Facebook, etc., then maybe you ought to challenge yourself to really learn detachment from the world and keep your fast throughout Sunday. If, however, you want Sundays off because it really helps you to rejoice in the Lord and with your family and friends on Sunday (for example, if one of your Facebook friends is in China and that's the only way you get to hang out), then I say, forget about your fasting on Sunday. It's all a matter of our intentions: am I fasting, or am I not fasting, for the right reason? Or are my reasons proud, selfish, or self-indulgent? Let us especially make the Sundays of Lent pleasing to God not only by our actions, but by an upright and sincere heart.

### **Laetare Sunday**

Like the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent is the half way point in the season, and so a day of special joy as we draw nearer to the Easter mysteries. "Laetare" is from the Latin verb "to rejoice." The Sunday picked up this name because the Entrance Antiphon (which you can learn all about by listening to my Mass talks) for that day is from the old Latin translation of Isaiah 66:10-11: "Rejoice [Laetare], Jerusalem: and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breasts." On this Sunday, the penitential purple may be lightened to rose, flowers may decorate the church, and musical instruments may be played. (We kind of ignore this last rule about no instruments during Lent. Maybe we'll work on it in the future, but it's the spirit of the law, not the letter.)

### **The Fifth Sunday of Lent: Covering the Statues**

As you may remember, there is an old tradition during Lent of covering all of the statues (and where convenient, paintings) of Christ and the Saints. There are different traditions even here in the U.S. as to when to do that, but the most common tradition is to cover them beginning on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (today). The statues of Christ crucified remained covered until the unveiling of the cross on Good Friday; the other statues are uncovered before the Easter Vigil. Why do we do this? It is another way of preparing or fasting to get ready for Easter Sunday. By hiding the images of our beloved Savior and those fully redeemed members of His Body, the Saints, we try to shake off the routininess of seeing our representations of them. That way, as we celebrate the Easter mystery of the Resurrection, we can see them anew and be called to a deeper relationship with those people—and our Lord and God—whom the statues merely represent. If you are interested, it can be a good family practice as well. My mother still covers all of the little statues and images in our house every year during Lent. It is another of those meaningful moments of the liturgy that we can be lived out in our own personal and family life.

### **The Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

March 19<sup>th</sup> is the higher ranking of the two feasts we have in honor of St. Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus Christ. (The other feast is May 1<sup>st</sup>, the Optional Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker.) Although the only description of St. Joseph's personality given us by Scripture is that

he was a “just man” (Matt. 1:19), he is traditionally thought to be one of the greatest Saints in history. Certainly, he was chosen to be the husband of the sinless woman Mary and the protector of her virginity, as well as the human father who would help shape the human mind and personality of the God-man Himself. There is little doubt, then, that he must have been an extraordinary man. As the foster-father of Jesus Christ, he is, of course, the patron of all fathers, but also of the Universal Church. As a carpenter, he is patron of workers. Finally, because he assumedly died in the arms of Jesus and Mary he is patron of a happy death. As a solemnity falling in the middle of Lent, this feast day is always a joyous one because all of our Lenten penances are allowed to be suspended for the day due to the solemn and holy nature of the feast!

### **The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord**

The solemnity celebrating the Archangel Gabriel’s announcement to Blessed Mary that she will become the Mother of God is traditionally on March 25<sup>th</sup>, nine months before Christmas. (Of course, all true *Lord of the Rings* fans know this because March 25<sup>th</sup> is the day on which the One Ring is destroyed, heralding the definitive destruction of evil and ending its corruption of the world. J.R.R. Tolkien is just reproducing in his books what we already believe about the effect of God’s Incarnation.) However, this year March 25<sup>th</sup> falls on the Monday of Holy Week. There are only two liturgical things during this time of the year that can ever outrank a solemnity of Our Lady, and they happened to be Holy Week and the Easter Octave. Because of this, the Solemnity of the Annunciation will be transferred this year to April 8<sup>th</sup>, the first free day after Holy Week and the Octave. Gotta love calendar logistics, eh? Of course, this does remind us of something very important if obvious: Jesus Christ is more important than His Mother Mary. So, next time your Protestant friends ask why Catholics worship Mary, you can give them a lesson on the liturgical calendar.

### **The Annunciation and the Angelus**

This Tuesday we celebrate the great Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord: when the Archangel Gabriel announced to the young, sinless Virgin Mary that she was to become the mother of the long-awaited Messiah and, more importantly, the Mother of God Incarnate. This is the day when Jesus Christ was conceived—the beginning of the Incarnation, nine months before Christmas—and as such the only other day of the year besides Christmas itself when we genuflect during the Creed at the words, “and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.” This is such a significant event that it is (or at least was) the practice of the faithful to commemorate it three times a day—at 6am, noon, and 6pm—by praying the *Angelus* prayer. I am currently teaching the *Angelus* to the kids in our Aftercare Program, and they almost have the whole thing memorized. What about you? Perhaps during this Lenten season of prayer you might take the time to learn this traditional prayer of our faith:

### **The Angelus**

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, etc.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord,  
R. Be it done unto me according to Thy word.  
Hail Mary, etc.

V. And the Word was made flesh, (*all genuflect at this line*)  
R. And dwelt amongst us.  
Hail Mary, etc.

V. Pray for us, O most holy Mother of God,  
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts; that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **The Annunciation and the *Regina Caeli***

You may or may not remember this, but last year at this time I wrote about the traditional *Angelus* prayer. That prayer, which is prayed by many Catholics at 6 A.M., 12 P.M., and 6 P.M. each day, is a memorial of the moment that we will be celebrating this week on March 25<sup>th</sup>: the Annunciation of Our Lord's Incarnation to the Virgin Mary by the Archangel Gabriel. Well, there's actually another prayer for the same purpose known as the *Regina caeli*, i.e., the Queen of Heaven. This prayer is said in place of the *Angelus* during the Easter Season. So, if you have the habit of praying the *Angelus*, you won't want to start using the *Regina caeli* yet, but I encourage you to do so once the Easter Season begins. Here is the prayer in English (it is one of the few prayers and/or hymns that some Catholics still know in Latin). May we use it and the *Angelus* as ways of reminding ourselves daily of the wonder of Christ's Incarnation and the beginning of our redemption. (Nb. The abbreviations "V." and "R." stand for "versicle" and "response.")

### **Queen of Heaven**

V. Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia!  
R. For He Whom thou didst merit to bear, alleluia!  
V. Has risen, as He said, alleluia!  
R. Pray for us to God, alleluia!  
V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia!  
R. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia!

Let us pray. O God, who gave joy to the world through the resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may obtain the joys of everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

One more little note:

If you really like things to rhyme, then here's a different translation of the beginning of the prayer that has an a/b/a/b rhyme scheme. The "Alleluias" kind of hide it, but it's there.

V. Joy to thee, O Queen of Heaven. Alleluia!

R. He whom Thou wast meet to bear. Alleluia!

V. As He promised hath arisen. Alleluia!

R. Pour for us to God thy prayer. Alleluia!

### **Following the King to the Cross and Beyond**

So, happy Palm Sunday! As you may know, this Sunday is actually called Passion (Palm) Sunday because it is a combination of two moments in Jesus' life which used to be separate feasts in the old liturgical calendar. First we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, hailed as the Messiah. Then we remember His betrayal by Judas, abandonment by His disciples, rejection by many of His own people—especially the leaders—and finally His unjust sentence, crucifixion, and death. How sadly ironic that so many of those who followed Him into the city on the day of the palms refused to follow Him out of the city on the day of His passion. Which brings us to the present. Will we repeat the faithlessness of the original followers of Jesus, or will we do our best to follow Him as the Messiah all the way through death to the resurrection—and will we call others to do the same? I encourage you this Holy Week to attend the Triduum services and to invite others to do so. Especially for Easter Sunday, bring as many people as you can, particularly those who have no faith community, and encourage them to keep coming back with you!

### **The Feast of Divine Mercy**

We read the following in the *Diary* of St. Faustina: "On one occasion, I heard these words: My daughter, tell the whole world about My Inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will I contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy." (*Diary* 699)

This is the message that Jesus Christ has given to our day and age about His Divine Mercy and that we celebrate today on Divine Mercy Sunday, instituted by the now-St. John Paul II. But perhaps we ask ourselves, "What relevance does this have to my life?" Well, in a certain sense the answer is obvious—we are all sinners and need God's mercy. Sometimes, however, we forget how important, indeed necessary, that mercy is to us. Contemporary culture and modern technology offer us a wide range of temptations to actions that are extremely harmful to our

spiritual state. In fact, the sad reality is that many Catholics today, perhaps including ourselves, are living out our lives in ways that we know are contrary to God's Law and which involve serious sin. You know what I'm talking about—it's the usual litany: pre-marital sex, irregular marriages that are not blessed by the Church, contraception, abortion, the homosexual lifestyle, *in vitro* fertilization, and handing ourselves over to various forms of addiction, whether substance related (e.g., drugs and alcohol) or of a psychological nature (e.g., pornography and gambling).

Along with easier access to and opportunity for these sins that modern life provides, there remain all of the 'classic' mortal sins: hatred, consuming greed, serious lies, all forms of lust, missing Mass on Sundays, etc. How can we escape Hell when the snares of the Devil and our own pride are always lurking so close by? Only by relying on the mercy Jesus gives us in Confession and the holiness of life that He calls us to in the Eucharist (and, yes, in that order). We can't make it to Heaven without God's mercy. It isn't frosting on the cake—it is the cake, the kernel, the Gospel itself! Fr. Robert Barron has a very good, short YouTube video called "Extreme Demands, Extreme Mercy" that deals with this same problem very well; I recommend it to all who might be interested. Let us admit our great need for mercy on the great Feast of Jesus' mercy and rejoice in the Blood and Water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ for our salvation.

### **Queen of the May**

May is the month of our Blessed Lady, Immaculate Mary, who is our parish patroness. Our families should definitely foster devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, the greatest of the Saints. If your family does not already pray the rosary, I strongly encourage you to do so for this month. There are also countless other devotions to Our Lady, if you prefer, but devotion to our Queen is not an option for Catholics. The short and simple point is that if we don't love Holy Mary at least as much as our earthly mother, then we have work to do in our spiritual lives. Immaculate Heart of Mary, *ora pro nobis!*

### **The Climax of the Easter Season**

Next Sunday we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord; the Sunday following that is Pentecost, the last day of the Easter Season. The Ascension is really supposed to be celebrated on "Ascension Thursday," May 8<sup>th</sup> this year, marking the beginning of the world's first novena—nine days set aside for prayer. (Like most of the dioceses in the U.S., our diocese perpetually transfers this solemnity to a Sunday.) I will be talking about this in my homilies, but I would really like us at IHM to make a parish novena to prepare our parish for Pentecost. I feel like not only our parish, but our diocese, the Church in the U.S., and really the Church Universal could stand to have a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit this Pentecost. For our parish particularly, I would like to see us praying for open hearts, so that if there is a certain ministry God is calling us to, whether here at the parish or elsewhere, we will have the courage to say yes to the Holy Spirit and fill that need in the Body of Christ. Commitment to building up the Kingdom of God is what the situation of our modern world demands from us as Catholics. *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, as

the Jesuits (like our new Pope) say, “For the greater glory of God!” (P.S., Do you like how I managed to use Latin twice in my bulletin articles today? Yea Latin; it makes me smile!)

### **Vigil of Pentecost—come one, come all!**

Have you ever wanted to attend the Easter Vigil Mass, but never been able to because of the lateness, length, other obligations, etc.? Well, now you can get a little bit of a taste at the Pentecost Vigil Mass. One of the ancient traditions of the liturgical year that was revived with the newest edition of the Roman Missal is a special vigil Mass for Pentecost. What is a vigil? Well, it is a time of watchfulness, of vigilance—which we do through an extended time of prayer. (This, by the way, is why we call those candles by the Holy Family statue “vigil lights;” the candle represents our desire to stay before the Lord in church and pray for our intention, even though we cannot actually do that. It keeps vigil for us, so to speak.) Now, the Pentecost Vigil is not nearly as extensive as the Easter Vigil, but it does have a longer Liturgy of the Word, with extra readings and psalms. Pentecost is an important time of praying for the Holy Spirit to come and refresh us. We will be emailing out a novena for the parish to pray together, but this Vigil Mass is also an important way to prepare for what the Holy Spirit wants to give us. Hope to see you there!

### **The Two Hearts**

The first full week of June is a very solemn week around our parish—because of all the liturgical solemnities! Of course, we start off with today’s solemnity of Corpus Christi. To quote from the Corpus Christi Sequence written by St. Thomas Aquinas, *Lauda Sion*, “Hear, what holy Church maintaineth, / That the bread its substance changeth / Into Flesh, the wine to Blood. / Doth it pass thy comprehending? / Faith, the law of sight transcending / Leaps to things not understood. / Here beneath these signs are hidden / Priceless things, to sense forbidden, / Signs, not things, are all we see. / Flesh from bread, and Blood from wine, / Yet is Christ in either sign, / All entire, confessed to be.” If you have the time, pray the whole Sequence; it has some deep theology in it.

But as I said, today is just the beginning. This Friday is the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion, popularized by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, reminds us of the very humanness of Jesus’ love for us, the tenderness of His Heart wherein His Divine and human natures meet in His one Divine Person. Jesus has experienced all of the emotions that we have in life. He alone understands the mysteries of the human heart because, in truth, each of our hearts was modeled after His. He is our first and final cause, our beginning and end, our Alpha and Omega. He wants His love to dwell in our hearts—indeed, our very hearts to dwell in His Heart.

And, of course, nowhere is this more perfectly reflected than in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, never hardened or reduced by any sin. That is why the following Saturday is always the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Since this is our patronal feast, however, it is not a memorial for us, but a solemnity. Bishop Foys has given us permission this year to transfer the celebration of the Immaculate Heart to June 9<sup>th</sup>, the following Sunday, to make it easier for the entire parish to participate in our patronal celebration. Even as we celebrate at the church, I encourage all of us to take some special time at home with our families to pray to the Sacred and

Immaculate Hearts and consecrate ourselves more fully to the service of our Divine King and Heavenly Queen.

### **The Sacred and Immaculate Hearts**

Today we, as a parish, celebrate our patronal feast, the Immaculate Heart of Mary! This past Friday was also the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These two hearts ought to be at the center of love and worship in our Catholic families. Although the Feast of the Sacred Heart is over, it is never too late to consecrate your family to Jesus' Sacred Heart and enthrone an image (statue or picture) of Him in a prominent place in your house. There are various ceremonies that can be used for this. Here are a few that I have found:

<<http://sacredheartdevotion.com/consecration/>>;

<<http://www.apostleshipofprayer.org/familyconsecration.html>>;

<<http://www.dailycatholic.org/enthronement.htm>>. It would also be good to consecrate yourselves to both of these Two Hearts together (kind of like what our grotto will be about, if we ever get it up). Here is a prayer that I encourage all of our families to pray today on our patronal feast.

**Act of family consecration:** Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, we consecrate ourselves and our entire family to you. We consecrate to you: our very being and all our life. All that we are. All that we have. And all that we love. To you we give our bodies, our hearts and our souls. To you we dedicate our home and our country. Mindful of this consecration, we promise you to live the Christian way by the practice of Christian virtues, with great regard for respect for one another. O Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, accept our humble confidence and this act of consecration by which we entrust ourselves and all our family to you. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

### **Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us!**

As we solemnly celebrate today our patronal feast, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, let us take the time to really think about our Mother's love for us, how tender her heart is—how great her joy is when we follow her Son, how great her sorrow is when we go astray in sin. Please take the opportunity on this day that unites us all together as a parish family to renew our consecration to the Immaculate Heart be personally and as a parish. Here is one such prayer of consecration written by Venerable Pope Pius XII that you may use:



### **A Solemn Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

Most Holy Virgin Mary, tender Mother of men, to fulfill the desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the request of the Vicar of Your Son on earth, we consecrate ourselves and our families to your Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart, O Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, and we recommend to You, all the people of our country and all the world.

Please accept our consecration, dearest Mother, and use us as You wish to accomplish Your designs in the world.

O Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, and Queen of the World, rule over us, together with the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, Our King. Save us from the spreading flood of modern paganism; kindle in our hearts and homes the love of purity, the practice of a virtuous life, an ardent zeal for souls, and a desire to pray the Rosary more faithfully.

We come with confidence to You, O Throne of Grace and Mother of Fair Love. In flame us with the same Divine Fire which has inflamed Your own Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart. Make our hearts and homes Your shrine, and through us, make the Heart of Jesus, together with your rule, triumph in every heart and home. Amen.

### **August 15<sup>th</sup> Holy Day of Obligation**

This coming Thursday is the obligatory Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whereon we remember how Holy Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven without her body ever suffering corruption. There are different opinions about whether or not Mary actually died, or simply fell into a deep sleep. This is why you will sometimes hear people talk about the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin (“dormition” from the same root as “dormant” and “dormitory” and referring to sleeping [Latin: *dormire*]). Either way, she now sits beside her Son as Queen of Heaven and earth, her glorified body and immaculate soul in the perfect harmony and power that God intends for all His faithful. This special privilege was given to Mary by her Divine Son because she is His mother; however, we should all remember that Mary is a sign of hope for us because we will all share in this glorious destiny on the Last Day.

The Assumption of Mary is one of the four teachings on our Blessed Mother that has been dogmatically defined by the Church, the other three being that she is the Mother of God, that she

was (and is) perpetually a virgin, and that she was immaculately conceived. We will have Masses for the Holy Day of Obligation 7PM on the vigil (Wed.), and 8AM, 10AM, and 7PM on the day. As always on Thursdays, Adoration will be available from after the 10AM Mass, ending with Benediction before 7PM. I encourage us to take this opportunity to “go to Jesus through Mary” by coming to adore the Holy Eucharist on Our Lady’s holy day (especially since school is off for the day!).

### **Holy Day of Obligation: Aug. 15, The Assumption**

Here is an excerpt from a homily on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (known by eastern Christians as the Dormition) by St. John Damascene, one of the last of the Church Fathers (died AD 749). The Church Fathers were very important in helping us understand Jesus’ teachings and our faith; they are important resources for us to read.

“But even though, according to nature, your most holy and happy soul is separated from your most blessed and stainless body and the body as usual is delivered to the tomb, it will not remain in the power of death and is not subject to decay. For just as her virginity remained inviolate while giving birth, when she departed her body was preserved from destruction and only taken to a better and more divine tabernacle, which is not subject to any death....Hence I will call her holy passing not death, but falling asleep or departure, or better still, arrival....Your stainless and wholly immaculate body has not been left on earth; the Queen, the Mistress, the Mother of God who has truly given birth to God has been translated to the royal palaces of heaven.

“Angels and archangels have borne you upwards, the impure spirits of the air have trembled at your ascension. The air is purified, the ether sanctified by your passing through them. . . the powers meet you with sacred hymns and much solemnity, saying something like this: Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, elect like the sun? (cf. Cant. 6:9) How you have blossomed forth, how sweet you have become! You are the flower of the field, a lily among the thorns (Cant. 2:1)...Not like Elijah have you entered heaven, not like Paul have you been rapt to the third heaven; no, you have penetrated even to the royal throne of your Son Himself...a blessing for the world, a sanctification of the universe, refreshment for those who are tired, comfort for the sorrowing, healing for the sick, a port for those in danger, pardon for sinners, soothing balm for the oppressed, quick help for all who pray to you....Good Mistress, graciously look down on us; direct and guide our destinies wheresoever you will. Pacify the storm of our wicked passions, guide us into the quiet port of the divine will and grant us the blessedness to come.”

### **Calling to Mind the Church Triumphant and Suffering**

A reminder that Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> is All Saints Day, a holy day of obligation. As we celebrate Halloween (All Hallows Eve is what the name means, of course, i.e., the Night of All the Holy Ones) this year, I encourage us to remember the Christian roots and true meaning of this holiday. While there is nothing wrong with candy, costumes, and fun, we should spend at least some time praying to all the Saints and asking their protection from the Devil and all evil spirits. Of course, the very next day is All Souls Day, Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>, when we pray for all the faithful departed, that their souls may be swiftly released from Purgatory if they are still in the process of purification. And

please remember: “A *plenary indulgence*, applicable only to the souls in Purgatory, is granted to the faithful who: 1° on any and each day of November 1 to 8, devoutly visit a cemetery and pray, if only mentally, for the departed; 2° on All Souls’ Day, devoutly visit a church or an oratory and recite an Our Father and the Creed.” (*Handbook of Indulgences*) May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

### **The Temple of Stones is a Symbol of the Living Church**

Today the liturgy celebrates the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, called “mother and head of all the churches of the city [i.e., Rome] and the world.” In fact, this basilica was the first to be built after Emperor Constantine’s edict, in 313, granted Christians freedom to practice their religion. [...] The emperor himself gave Pope Miltiades the ancient palace of the Laterani family.... The basilica’s dedication was celebrated by Pope Sylvester around 324 and was named Most Holy Savior; only after the 6th century were the names of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist added, and now is typically denominated by these latter.

On this solemnity the Word of God recalls an essential truth: the temple of stones is a symbol of the living Church, the Christian community [...] (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17; 1 Peter 2:4-8; Ephesians 2:20-22). [...] The beauty and harmony of the churches, destined to give praise to God, also draws us human beings, limited and sinful, to convert to form a “cosmos,” a well-ordered structure, in intimate communion with Jesus, who is the true Saint of saints. This happens in a culminating way in the Eucharistic liturgy, in which the “ecclesia,” that is, the community of the baptized, come together in a unified way to listen to the Word of God and nourish themselves with the Body and Blood of Christ. From these two tables the Church of living stones is built up in truth and charity and is internally formed by the Holy Spirit transforming herself into what she receives, conforming herself more and more to the Lord Jesus Christ. She herself, if she lives in sincere and fraternal unity, in this way becomes the spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God.

Dear friends, today’s feast celebrates a mystery that is always relevant: God’s desire to build a spiritual temple in the world, a community that worships him in spirit and truth (cf. John 4:23-24). But this observance also reminds us of the importance of the material buildings in which the community gathers to celebrate the praises of God. Every community therefore has the duty to take special care of its own sacred buildings, which are a precious religious and historical patrimony. For this we call upon the intercession of Mary Most Holy, that she help us to become, like her, the “house of God,” living temple of his love.

— Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, November 9, 2008