

Reflection for 10th December

Some thoughts on how to celebrate the Holy Season of Advent in preparation for Christmas and the New Year

Advent

Throughout the year the Church wants to focus our minds on certain important aspects of the faith. So, during December and Advent we think about and prepare for the coming of Jesus. There are four Sundays in Advent and the readings at Mass remind us that not only are we looking forward to the coming of Our Lord at Christmas but also the second coming of Jesus at the end of time.

We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that these are the last days, ‘...since the Ascension of Our Lord into heaven God’s plan has entered into its fulfilment and Christ’s return in glory has been imminent. We have already reached the last hour. The final age of the world is with us and the renewal of the world is irrevocably underway (CCC670-673). So, there’s no turning back, it is a truth of our faith, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. All throughout the Mass we are praying for and looking forward to the second coming of Christ, *...we proclaim your death O Lord and profess your resurrection until you come again. Deliver us Lord from every evil... as we await the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

And not just in the Mass do we find references to the second coming of Jesus, the New Testament is full of them, 300 references in fact, pointing to the second coming of Jesus. Only 4 of the 27 books in the New Testament fail to mention the second coming when Jesus returns in glory. Over the years many have speculated about what the end of times will be like, will it be a nuclear war, will there be three days of darkness during which only blessed candles can be lit, the truth is we don’t really know.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Obviously the main celebration in December is Christmas but there are other feasts as well. On 8th December we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast is all about how Mary had to be conceived without sin in order to be worthy to be the Mother of Jesus. Jesus, as the Son of God was perfect and therefore the womb of the Virgin Mary had to be a perfect place for Our Lord to start his earthly life. So, when Mary was conceived she did not inherit original sin, the sin of Adam, as we do. She was conceived immaculately. Her parents were St Anne and St Joachim. They were good, faithful parents who raised Mary with a love and devotion to God like none other except Jesus Christ Himself. Joachim and Anne serve as role models for parents and both deserve to be honoured and emulated for their devotion to God and Mary, the Mother of God.

If you know about Lourdes, the place of pilgrimage in France, and the story of St Bernadette you might remember that when Bernadette asked Our Lady her name she said ‘I am the Immaculate Conception’. One of the ways we know that the apparition to Bernadette could be authentic is that Bernadette was unaware of this title of Our Lady and yet was able to tell the priest that these were her exact words.

Feast of St Stephen 26th December

The day we call Boxing Day is actually the feast of St Stephen, who was a deacon and the first martyr of the Church. He was stoned to death outside Jerusalem for being a Christian. At that time there were only seven deacons in the Church, now there are thousands. Deacons can do everything a priest can do except offer Mass and forgive sins (hear confessions and anoint the sick).

The Stoning of Stephen

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

You can read Stephen's magnificent speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin in Acts of the Apostles chapter 7 verses 1-60. If you read his speech carefully you can see why they wanted to put him to death.

Feast of St John the Evangelist

Another important feast in December is the feast of St John (27th Dec). He was the youngest of the apostles and Jesus was like a father figure to him and looked after him even when he was dying on the cross. His last words were to his mother and John when he told them to care for each other. As well as writing the Gospel, St John also wrote 3 epistles and the book of Revelation. John and his brother James were specially called by Jesus and witnessed the Transfiguration with St Peter. St John is a model of purity and dedication to the love of God.

Feast of the Holy Innocents

This feast on the 28th remembers the terrible slaughter of the innocent baby boys killed by King Herod in an attempt to get rid of Jesus whom he considered a rival king. They are considered martyrs because they died for Christ although they did not know him. You can read this story in Matthew 2 verses 13-18. It is also a day when we remember the slaughter of innocent children lost through abortion throughout the world. We pray that Our Lord will move the hearts and minds of all people who cannot see this as a terrible evil.

Feast of the Holy Family

On the 29th December we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. It is a celebration of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the example of a family totally dedicated the love of God and one for us to follow. The concept of the family is under constant attack in today's world where many other alternatives are presented as equally desirable. But the Christian view of the family is that of a husband and wife, committed to each other in Holy Matrimony living together in a relationship which is open to the possibility of new life through having children. Many social studies conducted throughout the world clearly show that children who are brought up in a traditional family generally thrive much better than those who don't, although there are exceptions of course.

Try to attend Mass on at least one of these feasts over the Christmas period and pray for the intentions of your family, the strength to remain faithful to living the Catholic way of life and for a renewal of the faith in this country and in Europe.

Deacon Kevin