

*A Roman Catholic Personal Parish  
for the Extraordinary Form  
in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

# MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD of JESUS PARISH

## Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus

January 5, A.D. 2025



### **Mass Schedule**

Sundays: 8am, 11am  
Monday: 12 Noon  
Tuesday: 12 Noon & 7pm  
Wednesday through Friday: 12 Noon  
1st Friday of Month: 12 Noon & 7pm  
Saturday: 9am

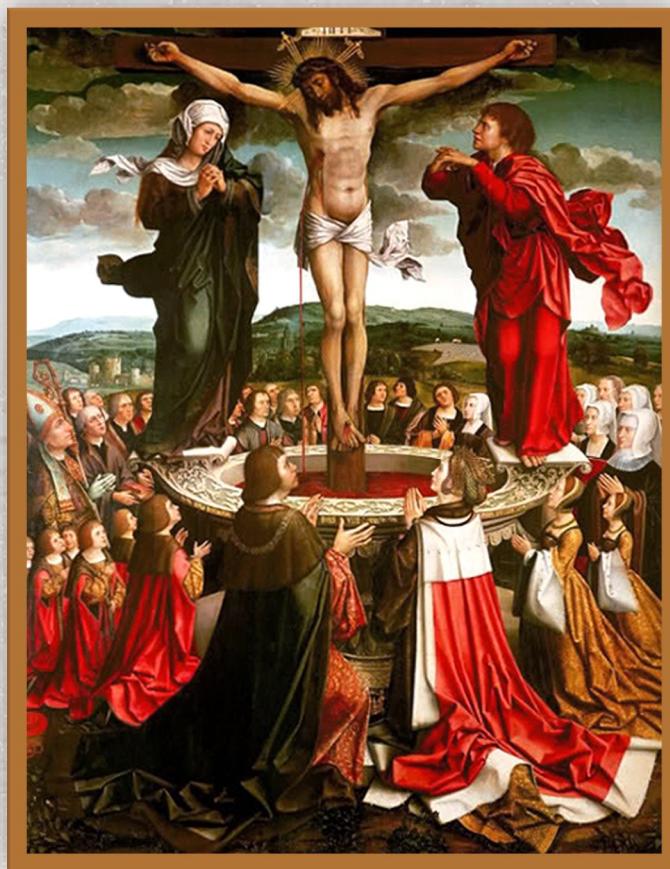
### **Confession Schedule**

Sundays: 7-8am; 10-11am  
Monday-Friday: 11:15-11:45am  
Tuesdays: also 6:15-6:45pm  
Saturday: 8-8:45am

*Please consult the Liturgical Schedule on page 2 for particular modifications to this standard schedule.*

### **Clergy & Staff**

Canon William Avis, *Pastor*  
[pastor@mpboj.com](mailto:pastor@mpboj.com)  
Canon Ross Bourgeois, *Parochial Vicar*  
[canon.bourgeois@institute-christ-king.org](mailto:canon.bourgeois@institute-christ-king.org)  
Geraldine Redic, *Business Manager/Safe Environment*  
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Michael Eyler, *Catechism Administrator*  
[catechism@mpboj.com](mailto:catechism@mpboj.com)



### **Contact Information**

Parish Office Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm  
3250 California Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15212  
Phone 412-761-1508  
Fax: 412-761-6454  
Email: [office@mpboj.com](mailto:office@mpboj.com)  
Website: [mostpreciousbloodparish.org](http://mostpreciousbloodparish.org) or  
[mpboj.com](http://mpboj.com)

*Pennsylvania Childline (report suspected child abuse)*  
1-800-932-0313  
*Protection of Children and Youth (diocesan office)*  
1-888-808-1235



***Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest***

***Veritatem Facientes In Caritate—Furthering the Truth in Charity***

## Liturgical Schedule

### **Sunday, January 5, 2025**

#### **Holy Name of Jesus, 2nd Class—White**

8AM LMO *Pro populo*

11AM HM Living & Deceased Members of the Bucko & Zeher Family (M. Zeher)

Processional: *At the Name of Jesus* (pg. 54)

Recessional: *Adeste Fidelis* (pg. 52)

7PM Epiphany Water Blessing

### **Monday, January 6, 2025**

#### **Epiphany of the Lord, 1st Class—White**

12PM LM +Peace of the soul of Deanna Shannon (Charles J. Shannon)

7PM HM In Reparation for the sins of Blasphemy (Glenn & Judy Wilson)

Recessional: *Watchmen Tell Us of the Night* (pg. 97)

### **Tuesday, January 7, 2025**

#### **Feria of Epiphany, 4th Class—White**

12PM LM Healing of Marlene Robbins (Robbins Family)

7PM LM James Paras (Family)

### **Wednesday, January 8, 2025**

#### **Feria of Epiphany, 4th Class—White**

12PM LM Andrew & Marianne Pumford & Family (Family)

### **Thursday, January 9, 2025**

#### **Feria of Epiphany, 4th Class—White**

12PM LM +Florence Colangelo (Rattay Family)

8PM Holy Hour of Adoration

9PM Compline

### **Friday, January 10, 2025**

#### **Feria of Epiphany, 4th Class—White**

12PM LM Dena Daltry (Aja Bencsics)

### **Saturday, January 11, 2025**

#### **Our Lady on Saturday, 4th Class-White**

*Commemoration of St. Hyginus*

9AM LM Sharon Burchill (Patrizio Family)

### **Sunday, January 12, 2025**

#### **Holy Family, 2nd Class—White**

8AM LMO *Pro populo*

11AM HM +Edith Cokley (Mary Eileen Cokley)

Processional: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* (pg. 78)

Recessional: *Bethlehem of Noblest Cities* (pg. 56)

LM = Low Mass; LMO = Low Mass with Organ; HM = High/Solemn Mass

## Our Weekly Offerings

*Sunday, December 29, 2024*

Offertory .....	\$18,310.00
Parish Improvement .....	\$20.00
Poor Box .....	\$967.00
ICRSS/Saint Veronica Altar Guild .....	\$2,697.00
Christmas Charities .....	\$125.00
St. Anthony School .....	\$10.00

*Faith Direct Report (December 1 – 15, 2024)*

Offertory (incl. Immaculate Conception & Christmas) .....	\$11,333.83
Parish Appeal 2024 .....	\$355.00
Parish Improvement .....	\$1,130.00
Poor Box .....	\$440.00
Christmas Flowers .....	\$200.00
Children/Youth Christmas Collection .....	\$20.00

*Attendance: 8AM 392; 11AM 433; Total 825*

## Parish Group News

RESPECT LIFE GROUP (RLG) The Gospel of Life is at the heart of this group. RLG promotes a culture of life through three working

subcommittees of Legislation, Education, and Advocacy. Contact Brenda Briola at [respectlife@mpboj.com](mailto:respectlife@mpboj.com) or 724-650-5767 for info.

Our Baby Blessing Box at MPBOJ is currently seeking donations of infant sleepers or onesies, binkies/teethers/small toys, diaper crème, wipes, diapers all sizes, but especially size 5 and bigger. Donation Bins are located at the entrances to the church.

CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN MOTHERS will next meet on **Saturday, February 1st, beginning with the 9AM Mass. Next month's topic is "On Confirmation"**. Please contact [christianmothers@mpboj.com](mailto:christianmothers@mpboj.com) for more information. All adult women are welcome to attend.

SURSUM CORDA-YOUNG ADULTS GROUP is a nationwide initiative to foster the spiritual lives of Catholic adults, AGES 18–35, at Institute apostolates. To sign up for the mailing list and receive notice of future events, text **Corda** to 84576 and choose "SC Pittsburgh." For more information, contact José Piñero at 863.450.5143 or [sursumcorda@mpboj.com](mailto:sursumcorda@mpboj.com).

## Upcoming Events

**Today:** Epiphany Blessing of water, salt, and chalk, 7 p.m.

**Mon. Jan 6:** Epiphany 12 p.m. Low Mass; 7 p.m. High Mass

## Epiphany Water Blessing



This evening, the Epiphany Water Blessing will take place at 7 p.m. The water will be provided by the parish, so please bring empty holy water bottles to take Epiphany Water home. The Blessed Water will be available as supplies last. Those who would like blessed salt can bring their containers of salt (labeled with their name).

## Blessed Chalk and House Blessings

Next Sunday, blessed chalk will be available in the church entrances, along with instructions on how to bless your home with the chalk. If you have blessed chalk from previous years, you can still use it for this year.

## Rosary Rally January 18th

There will be a Rosary Rally for Life and to End Abortion on Saturday, 18 January 2025 at 12 noon in the parking lot of Most Precious Blood of Jesus Parish. For additional information, contact Mary Brodka at 724-816-5573.

## Donation Statements for 2024

In an effort to save time and expense, the parish no longer sends end-of-year donation summaries to all of those parishioners who utilize envelopes. If you would like to have a printed summary mailed to you, please contact the parish office (phone 412-761-1508 or email [office@mpboj.com](mailto:office@mpboj.com)). Those who utilize Faith Direct will receive a summary directly from the company.

## Please Use Your Offertory Envelopes

The parish greatly appreciates the generous donations received each week from parishioners and visitors alike. If you are a parishioner who makes donations using a check, please consider using your collection envelopes so the office can easily record your donations for tax purposes.

When you submit a check without an envelope, staff must take an extra step to identify your envelope number so your donation is accurately recorded. The parish is very fortunate and grateful for the financial support received each week.

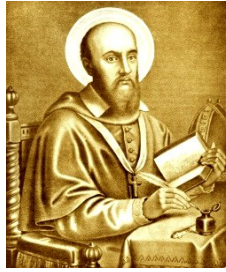
## Introduction to the Devout Life

By St. Francis de Sales

### The Sanctity of the Marriage Bed

(Book 3, Chapter 39)

The marriage bed should be undefiled, as the Apostle tells us, i.e. pure, as it was when it was first instituted in the earthly Paradise, wherein no unruly desires or impure thought might enter. All that is merely earthly must be treated as means to fulfil the end God sets before His creatures. Thus we eat in order to preserve life, moderately, voluntarily, and without seeking an undue, unworthy satisfaction therefrom. "The time is short," says Saint Paul; "it remaineth that both they that have wives be as



though they had not, and they that use this world, as not abusing it."

Let every one, then, use this world according to his vocation, but so as not to entangle himself with its love, that he may be as free and ready to serve God as though he used it not. Saint Augustine says that it is the great fault of men to want to enjoy things which they are only meant to use, and to use those which they are only meant to enjoy. We ought to enjoy spiritual things, and only use those which are material; but when we turn the use of these latter into enjoyment, the reasonable soul becomes degraded to a mere brutish level.

### 2025 Institute Calendars

The 2025 Institute of Christ the King calendars are still available at both entrances of the church. Please take a copy home with you. These calendars are provided free of charge, but should you wish to make a donation, you may utilize the *Benedictus* donation box at the side entrance.

### Ecclesiastical Latin Online Course

An online course by the Saint Sharbel Spiritual Life Center

Join us for a 16-week course covering the basic grammar and vocabulary needed to begin reading the principal language of Holy Mother Church.

- Weekly course running January 13 to May 12, Mondays from 4:30-6:00 PM
- Registration is \$150 for the whole course (textbook not included)
- 32 seats available
- 100% online course
- Class taught by Paul Kengor, Jr.



Visit our website for registration, [saintsharbelcenter.org/retreats/intro-to-ecclesiasticallatin-jan-13-may-12-2025](http://saintsharbelcenter.org/retreats/intro-to-ecclesiasticallatin-jan-13-may-12-2025) or scan the QR code above.

### January Sursum Corda Luncheon Today

Sursum Corda will go out for lunch today, Sunday, January 5th @ 1:30 p.m. at Federal Gallery, 200 Children's Way, Pittsburgh 15212. Great chance to meet other Catholic Young Adults especially if you've never been to a luncheon before!

All young adults (18-35) are welcome to attend—we hope to see you there!

## Gospa Missions One Day Retreat

Saturday, May 17, at Highfield Community Center (229 Highfield Rd., Butler, PA 16001)

Registration, Breakfast, & Confession begin at 7:30 a.m. Join us for a faith-filled day of conversion, healing, and peace as we open our hearts to the Will of God in our lives. Join us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Rosary, religious store, lunch, & more!

A GOSPA MISSIONS RETREAT

REGISTER NOW

CALL TO CONVERSION

MAY 17, 2025

Highfield Community Center  
229 Highfield Road  
Butler, PA 16001

Premier Sponsor  
Betsey Ann's  
ANGELICA CHOCOLATE

Register: [Gospa.org](http://Gospa.org) or call us at 724-538-3171.

- Dave VanVickle, co-host of podcast "Every Knee Shall Bow"
- Deacon John Ragan, serves at Saints Joachim & Anne Parish
- Sister Rita Clare Yoches, T.O.R. of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother, featured on EWTN
- Chris Reynolds, President of Gospa Missions & Abode for Children

Sign Up Today at [Gospa.org](http://Gospa.org) or call (724) 538-3171 to get the Early Bird Pricing NOW through February 2.

### No One Dies Alone

No One Dies Alone (NODA) is a program at UPMC Mercy that seeks to ensure that dying patients, who may otherwise be alone, have the gift of human presence in their final hours. This presence is provided by specially trained volunteers called "Compassionate Companions". If you are interested in serving as a "Compassionate Companion", please contact Fr. Igor Hohosha, Pastor of St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church (our neighbor on California Ave.) and Chaplain at UPMC Mercy, at 412-478-5685, or by email at [hohoshai2@upmc.edu](mailto:hohoshai2@upmc.edu).

### Little-known Fact

You've probably heard of a church in London, England which is most commonly referred to as "Westminster Cathedral." It is the largest Roman Catholic church in England and Wales, and the seat of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. You may not know that its full formal name is



**"The Metropolitan Cathedral of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ".**

## To All of Our Guests...

The Canons and faithful of Most Precious Blood of Jesus Parish welcome you to our parish and to the Traditional Mass, celebrated in accordance with the classical Roman Liturgy. This personal parish was established by Bishop David Zubik on July 1, 2019, the feast of *The Most Precious Blood of Jesus*. Our parishioners come from all over the diocese for the prayerful tranquility of the Traditional Mass.

According to liturgical tradition, Holy Communion is received on the tongue, kneeling at the communion rail. Reception of Holy Communion is the sign of Divine and Ecclesial unity, so only practicing Catholics, free from mortal sin and who have observed the Eucharistic fast, may present themselves for Holy Communion. Visitors who are not of the Catholic Faith are welcome to join in prayer, but are requested not to receive Holy Communion. Those who need a low gluten Host should inform the usher as they approach the Communion rail, at the end of the distribution line for Holy Communion.

For more information about the parish, contact the Parish Office at 412-761-1508.

The pastoral care of Most Precious Blood of Jesus Parish is provided by  
THE INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST.



MOST PRECIOUS  
BLOOD of JESUS PARISH

### General Information

**Bulletin Announcements:** Requests for proposed bulletin announcements must be submitted **ten days in advance** of the publication date. Submit to [bulletin@mpboj.com](mailto:bulletin@mpboj.com).

**Mass Intentions:** The Parish Mass Intention Registry is currently CLOSED. Mass intentions are accepted at specific periods in the year and announced in the bulletin. Instructions and forms are available during those periods.

**Parish News:** The parish uses **Flocknote** to circulate news and information. Please text MPBOJ to 84576 from your cell phone and follow the instructions, or check the parish website ([MPBOJ.com](http://MPBOJ.com)) for more information.

**Parish Materials/Events:** At both church entrances, there are racks containing church forms, reading materials and prayer cards. Please feel free to take what you need, but do not leave any materials without explicit permission from the Pastor. Parish events publicized on the bulletin boards at both entrances. If you are involved in an event that you would like to publicize or schedule, please provide a copy of the notice or request to [office@mpboj.com](mailto:office@mpboj.com) for approval.

**On Line Contributions:** Most Precious Blood of Jesus Parish greatly appreciates all donations and contributions. If interested in making on-line contributions via Faith Direct, please visit: [membership.faithdirect.net/PA678](http://membership.faithdirect.net/PA678) or call 866-507-8757.

**Catholic Faith Formation and Spiritual needs:** For those seeking to join the Catholic faith, or who wish spiritual direction, please call the Parish Office for information.

**Rosary:** The Rosary is publicly recited one-half hour before most parish Masses.

### Sacramental Information

**Penance:** The parish offers the sacrament of penance forty-five minutes prior to each Mass. Confessionals are located on the Epistle (right-hand) side of the church, with a sign indicating where to stand for the line. There is an accessible confessional located on the right side of the double confessional, where the kneeler can be lifted for easy access. Both sides of the double confessional may be occupied at the same time. Start your confession when you hear the priest's blessing.

**Infant Baptism:** Baptism should be administered within two weeks of birth. Please call the Parish Office prior to the baby's birth, to begin arrangements.

**Holy Matrimony:** Couples planning to marry at the parish must contact the Parish Office at least six months in advance, to schedule an appointment to begin marriage preparation instructions.

**First Holy Communion and Confirmation:** School age students receive First Holy Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation as part of our Catechism Program. Please see the parish website for registration instructions.

**Extreme Unction/Anointing of the Sick:** If you need the assistance of a priest for someone who is dying, please contact the Parish Office at 412-761-1508. If after hours, listen to the prompts and select option #1.

**Funerals:** The funeral home should directly contact the Parish Office to make Mass and burial arrangements.

**Sacramental Records/Letters of Good Standing:** To obtain sacramental records or a letter in good standing, please contact the Parish Office at 412-761-1508 for instructions.

### Safety Awareness

In an effort to make Most Precious Blood of Jesus Parish a safe place for all parishioners and visitors alike, please be mindful of our urban neighborhood and the constant traffic. If visiting the parish for Mass or a social event, parents should ensure their children's safety by maintaining prudent watch and supervision of their children at all times. When children are registered and/or involved in a parish related activity overseen by a parish program manager (e.g., Children's Choir; Catechism; altar server practice), at least one parent/guardian must remain on site for the duration of the program.

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# The Season of Christmas from The Liturgical Year by Dom Guéranger

## PRACTICE DURING CHRISTMAS

The time has now come for the faithful soul to reap the fruit of the efforts she made during the penitential weeks of Advent to prepare a dwelling-place for the Son of God, who desires to be born within her. The *Nuptials of the Lamb are come, and his Spouse hath prepared herself* [Apoc. 19: 7]. Now the Spouse is the Church; the Spouse is also every faithful soul. Our Lord gives His whole self to the whole flock, and to each sheep of the flock with as much love as though He loved but that one. What garments shall we put on, to go and meet the Bridegroom? Where shall we find the pearls and jewels wherewith to deck our soul for this happy meeting? Our holy Mother the Church will tell us all this in her Liturgy. Our best plan for spending Christmas is, undoubtedly, to keep close to her, and do what she does; for she is most dear to God, and being our Mother, we ought to obey all her injunctions.

But, before we speak of the mystic Coming of the Incarnate Word into our souls; before we tell the secrets of that sublime familiarity between the Creator and the creature; let us, first, learn from the Church the duties which human nature and each of our souls owes to the Divine Infant, whom the Heavens have at length given to us as the refreshing *Dew* we asked them to *rain* down upon our earth. During Advent, we united with the Saints of the Old Law, in praying for the coming of the Messias, our Redeemer; now that He is come, let us consider what is the homage we must pay Him.

The Church offers to the Infant-God, during this holy season, the tribute of her profound adoration, the enthusiasm of her exceeding joy, the return of her unbounded gratitude, and the fondness of her intense love. These four offerings, *adoration, joy, gratitude, and love*, must be also those of every Christian to his Jesus, his Emmanuel, the Babe of Bethlehem. The prayers of the Liturgy will express all four sentiments in a way that no other Devotions could do. But, the better to appropriate to ourselves these admirable formulas of the Church, let us understand thoroughly the nature of each of these four sentiments.

The first of our duties at our Savior's Crib is *Adoration*. Adoration is Religion's first act; but there is something in the Mystery of our Lord's Birth which seems to make this duty doubly necessary. In heaven the Angels veil their faces, and prostrate themselves before the throne of Jehovah; the Four-and-Twenty Elders are forever *casting their crowns before the throne* [Apoc. 4: 10] of the Lamb; what, then, shall we do - we who are sinners, and unworthy members of the Tribe of the Redeemer - now that this same great God shows Himself to us, humbled for our sakes, and stripped of all His glory? now that the duties of the creature to his Creator are fulfilled by the Creator Himself? now that the eternal God bows down not only before the Sovereign Majesty of the Godhead, but even before sinful man, His creature?

Let us endeavor to make, by our profound adorations, some return to the God who thus humbles Himself for us; let us thus give Him back some little of that whereof He has deprived Himself out of love

for us, and in obedience to the will of His Father. It is incumbent on us to emulate, as far as possible, the sentiments of the Angels in heaven, and never to approach the Divine Infant without bringing with us the incense of our soul's adoration, the protestation of our own extreme unworthiness, and lastly, the homage of our whole being. All this is due to the infinite Majesty of the Babe of Bethlehem, who is the more worthy of every tribute we can pay Him, because He has made Himself thus little for our sakes. Unhappy we, if the apparent weakness of the Divine Child, or the familiarity wherewith He is ready to caress us, should make us negligent in this our first duty, or forget what He is, and what we are!

The example of His Blessed Mother will teach us to be thus humble. Mary was humble in the presence of her God, even before she became his Mother; but, once his Mother, she comported herself before Him who was her God and her Child with greater humility than ever. We too, poor sinners, sinners so long and so often, we must adore with all the power of our soul Him who has come down so low: we must study to find out how by our self-humiliation to make Him amends for this Crib, these swathing-bands, this eclipse of His glory. And yet all our humiliations will never bring us so low as that we shall be on a level with His lowliness. No; only God could reach the humiliations of God.

But our Mother, the Church, does not only offer to the Infant God the tribute of her profound *adoration*. The mystery of Emmanuel, that is, of God with us, is to her a source of singular *joy*. Look at her sublime Canticles for this holy Season, and you will find the two sentiments admirably blended - her deep reverence for her God, and her glad joy at his Birth. Joy! did not the very Angels come down and urge her to it? She therefore studies to imitate the blithe Shepherds, who ran for joy to Bethlehem [Luke 2: 16], and the glad Magi, who were well-nigh out of themselves with delight when, on quitting Jerusalem, the star again appeared and led them to the Cave *where the Child was* [Mt. 2: 10]. Joy at Christmas is a Christian instinct, which originated those many *Carols*, which, like so many other beautiful traditions of the ages of Faith,

are unfortunately dying out amongst us; but which Rome still encourages, gladly welcoming each year those rude musicians, the *Pifferari*, who come down from the Apennines, and make the streets of the Eternal City re-echo with their shrill melodies.

Come, then, faithful Children of the Church, let us take our share in her joy! This is not the season for sighing or for weeping. For unto us a Child is born! [Is. 9: 6]. He for whom we have been so long waiting is come; and He is come to *dwell among us* [Jn. 1: 14]. Great, indeed, and long was our suspense; so much the more let us love our possessing Him. The day will too soon come when this Child, *now born to us*, will be the *Man of Sorrows* [Is. 53: 3], and then we will compassionate Him; but at present we must rejoice and be glad at His coming and sing round His Crib with the Angels. Heaven sends us a present of its own joy: we need joy, and forty days are not too many for us to get it well into our hearts. The Scrip-



ture tells us that *a secure mind is like a continual feast* [Prov. 25: 15], and a secure mind can only be where there is peace; now it is Peace which these blessed days bring to the *earth*; *Peace*, say the Angels, *to men of good will!*

Intimately and inseparably united with this exquisite mystic joy is the sentiment of *gratitude*. *Gratitude* is indeed due to Him who, neither deterred by our unworthiness nor restrained by the infinite respect which becomes His sovereign Majesty, deigned to be born of His own creature, and have a stable for His birth-place. Oh! how vehemently must He not have desired to advance the work of our salvation, to remove everything which could make us afraid of approaching Him, and to encourage us, by His own example, to return, by the path of humility, to the heaven we had strayed from by pride!

Gratefully, therefore, let us receive the precious gift - this Divine Babe, our Deliverer. He is the Only- Begotten Son of the Father, that Father *who hath so loved the world as to give His only Son* [Jn 3: 16]. He, the Son, unreservedly ratifies His Father's will, and comes to offer Himself *because it is His own will* [Is. 53: 7]. *How*, as the Apostle expresses it, *hath not the Father with Him given us all things?* [Rm. 8: 32]. O gift inestimable! How shall we be able to repay it by suitable gratitude, we who are so poor as not to know how to appreciate it? God alone, and the Divine Infant in His Crib, know the value of the mystery of Bethlehem, which is given to us.

Shall our debt, then, never be paid? Not so: we can pay it by *love*, which, though finite, gives itself without measure, and may grow forever in intensity. For this reason, the Church, after she has offered her adorations and hymns and gratitude, to her Infant Savior, gives Him also her tenderest *Love*. She says to Him: *'How beautiful art Thou, my Beloved One, and how comely!* [Cant. 1: 15]. How sweet to me is Thy rising, O Divine Sun of Justice! How my heart glows in the warmth of Thy beams! Nay, dearest Jesus, the means Thou usest for gaining me over to Thyself are irresistible - the feebleness and humility of a Child!' Thus do all her words end in *love*; and her *adoration, praise, and thanksgiving*, when she expresses them in her Canticles, are transformed into *love*.

Christians! let us imitate our Mother, and give our hearts to our Emmanuel. The Shepherds offer Him their simple gifts, the Magi bring Him their rich presents, and no one must appear before the Divine Infant without something worthy His acceptance. Know, then, that nothing will please Him, but that which He came to seek - our *love*. It was for this that He came down from heaven. Hard indeed is that heart which can say, *He shall not have my love!*

These, then, are the duties we owe to our Divine Master in this His first Coming, which, as St. Bernard says, is *in the flesh and in weakness*, and is for the salvation, not for the judgement, of the world.

As regards that other *Coming*, which is to be in majesty and power on the Last Day, we have meditated upon it during Advent. The fear of the *Wrath to come* should have roused our souls from their lethargy, and have prepared them, by humility of heart, to receive the visit of Jesus in that secret *Coming* which He makes to the soul of man. It is the ineffable mystery of this *intermediate* Coming that we are now going to explain.

We have shown elsewhere how the time of *Advent* belongs to that period of the spiritual life which is called, in Mystic Theology, *the Purgative Life*, during which the soul cleanses herself from sin and the occasions of sin, by the fear of God's judgements, and by combating against evil concupiscence. We are taking it for granted that every faithful soul has journeyed through these rugged paths, which

must be gone through before she could be admitted to the Feast to which the Church invites all mankind, saying to them, on the Saturday of the Second Week of Advent, these words of the Prophet Isaias: *Lo! this is our God: we have waited for Him, and He will save us. We have patiently waited for Him, and we shall rejoice and be joyful in His Salvation!* [Is. 25: 9]. *As in the house of our heavenly Father there are many mansions* [Jn. 14: 2], so likewise, on the grand Solemnity of Christmas, when those words of Isaias are realized, the Church sees, amongst the countless throng who receive the Bread of Life, a great variety of sentiments and dispositions. Some were dead, and the graces given during the holy Season of Advent have restored them to life: others, whose spiritual life had long been healthy, have so spent their Advent that its holy exercises have redoubled their love of their Lord, and their entrance into Bethlehem has been to them a renewal of their soul's life.

Now every soul that has been admitted to Bethlehem, that is to say, into the *House of Bread*, and has been united with Him who is the *Light of the World* - that soul no longer walks in darkness. The mystery of Christmas is one of Illumination; and the grace it produces in the soul that corresponds with it, places her in the second *stage* of the mystic Life, which is called the *Illuminative Life*. Henceforward, then, we need no longer weary ourselves watching for our Savior's arrival; He has come, He has shone upon us, and we are resolved to keep up the light, nay, to cherish its growth within us, in proportion as the Liturgical Year unfolds its successive seasons of mysteries and graces. God grant that we may reflect in our souls the Church's progressive development of this divine Light; and be led by its brightness to that *Union* which crowns both the year of the Church, and the faithful soul which has spent the year under the Church's guidance!

But, in the mystery of Christmas-tide, this Light is given to us, so to speak, softened down; our weakness required that it should be so. It is indeed the Divine Word, the Wisdom of the Father, that we are invited to know and imitate; but this



*The Presentation in the Temple by Giotto*

Word, this Wisdom, are shown us under the appearance of a *Child*. Let nothing keep us from approaching Him. We might fear were He seated on a throne in His palace; but He is lying on a crib in a stable! Were it the time of His Fatigues, His Bloody Sweat, His Cross, His Burial, or even of His Glory and His Victory, we might say we had not courage enough: but what courage is needed to go near Him in Bethlehem, where all is sweetness and silence, and a simple Little Babe! *Come to Him*, says the Psalmist, *and be enlightened!* [Ps. 33: 6].

Where shall we find an interpreter of the twofold mystery which is wrought at this holy season - the mystery of the Infancy of Jesus in the soul of man, and the mystery of the infancy of man's soul in his Jesus? None of the Holy Fathers has so admirably spoken upon it as St. Leo: let us listen to his grand words.

Although that Childhood, which the majesty of the Son of God did not disdain to assume, has developed, by growth of age, into the fulness of the perfect man, and, the triumph of His Passion and Resurrection having been achieved, all the humiliations He submitted to for our sakes are passed; nevertheless, the Feast we are now keeping brings back to us the sacred Birth of the Virgin Mary's Child, Jesus our Lord. So that whilst adoring *His Birth*, we are, in truth, celebrating *our own* commencement of life; for the Generation of Christ is the origin of the Christian people, and the Birth Day of Him that is our Head is the Birth Day of us that are His Body. It is true, that each Christian has His own rank, and the children of the Church are

born each in their respective times; yet the whole mass of the Faithful, once having been regenerated in the font of Baptism, are born, on this Day of Christmas, together with Christ; just as they are crucified together with Him in His Passion, and have risen together with His Resurrection, and in His Ascension are placed at the right hand of the Father. For every believer, no matter in what part of the work he may be living, is born again in Christ; his birth according to nature is not taken into account; he becomes a new man by his second birth; neither is he any longer called of the family of his father in the flesh, but of the family of our Redeemer, who unto this was made a Son of Man, that we might become the Sons of God.' [Sixth Sermon *On the Nativity of our Lord*, Ch. 2].

Yes, this is the Mystery achieved in us by the holy Season of Christmas! It is expressed in those words of the passage from St. John's Gospel which the Church has chosen for the third Mass of the great Feast: *As many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the Sons of God, to them that believe in His name; who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* [Jn. 1: 22]. So that all they who, having purified their souls, freed themselves from the slavery of *flesh and blood*, and renounced everything which is of *man*, inasmuch as *man* means *sinner*, wish now to open their hearts to the Divine Word, that is, to the LIGHT which shineth in darkness, which darkness did not comprehend [Ibid. v. 5], these, I say, are born with Jesus; they are born of God; they begin a new life, as did the Son of God Himself in this mystery of His Birth in Bethlehem.

How beautiful are these first beginnings of the Christian Life! How great is the glory of Bethlehem, that is, of our holy Mother the Church, the true *House of Bread!* for in her midst there is produced, during these days of Christmas, and everywhere throughout the world, a countless number of *sons of God*. Oh! the unceasing vitality of our mysteries! As *the Lamb, who was slain from the beginning of the world* [Apoc. 8: 8], sacrifices Himself without ceasing, ever since His real sacrifice; so also, once born of the Holy Virgin His Mother, He makes it a part of His glory to be ceaselessly born in the souls of men. We are not, therefore, to think for a moment that the dignity of Mary's divine Maternity is lessened, or that *our* souls enjoy the same grand honor which was granted to her: far from that, 'let us,' as Venerable Bede says, 'raise our voice from amid the crowd, as did the woman in the Gospel, and say to our Savior, with the Catholic Church, of which that woman was the type: *Blessed is the Womb that bore Thee, and the Breasts that gave Thee suck!*' [Commentary on St Luke, Bk. 4, Ch. 49]. Mary's prerogative is indeed incommunicable, and it makes her the Mother of God, and the Mother of men. But we must also remember the answer made by our Savior to the woman, who spoke those words: *Yea rather, said Jesus, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it* [Mt. 12: 50], 'hereby declaring,' continues Venerable Bede, 'that not only is she blessed, who merited to conceive in the flesh the Word of God, but they also who endeavor to conceive this same Word spiritually, by the hearing of faith, and to give Him birth and nourish Him by *keeping* and doing what is good, either in their own or their neighbor's heart. For the Mother of God herself was *Blessed* in that she was made, for a time, the minister to the wants of the Incarnate Word; but much *more Blessed* was she, in that she was and ever will be the *keeper* and doer of the love due to that same her Son.'

Is it not this same truth which our Lord teaches us on that other occasion, where He says: *Whosoever shall do the will of My Father*

*that is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother?* [Mt. 12: 50]. And why was the Angel sent to Mary in preference to all the rest of the daughters of Israel, but because she had already conceived the Divine Word in her heart by the vehemence of her Undivided love, the greatness of her profound humility and the incomparable merit of her virginity? Why again, is this *Blessed among women* holy above all creatures, but because, having once conceived and brought forth a Son of God, she continues forever His *Mother*, by her fidelity in doing the will of the heavenly Father, by her love for the uncreated light of the Divine Word, and by her union as Spouse with the Spirit of sanctification?

But no member of the human race is excluded from the honor of imitating Mary, though at a humble distance, in this her spiritual Maternity: for, by that real birth which she gave Him in Bethlehem, which we are now celebrating, and which initiated the world into the mysteries of God, this ever Blessed Mother of Jesus has shown us how we may bear the resemblance of her own grand prerogative. We ought to have *prepared the way of the Lord* [Mt. 3: 3; Is. 40: 3] during the weeks of Advent; and if so, our hearts have conceived Him: therefore now our good works must bring Him forth, that thus our heavenly Father, seeing not us ourselves, but His own Son Jesus now living within us, may say of each of us, in His mercy, what He heretofore said in very truth of the Incarnate Word: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* [Mt. 3: 17].

Let us give ear to the words of the Seraphic St. Bonaventure, who in one of his sermons for Christmas Day thus explains the mystery of the birth of Jesus in the soul of man: 'This happy birth happens when the soul, prepared by long thought and reflection, passes at length to action; when the flesh being made subject to the spirit, good works are produced in due time: then do interior peace and joy return to the soul. In this birth there is neither travail nor pain nor fear; everything is admiration and delight and glory. If then, O devout soul! thou art desirous for this birth, imagine thyself to be like



*The Flight into Egypt by Giotto*

Mary. *Mary* signifies bitterness; bitterly bewail thy sins: it signifies *illuminatrix*, be thou illumined by thy virtues: and lastly, it signifies *Mistress*; learn how to be mistress and controller of thy evil passions. Then will Christ be born of thee, and oh! with what happiness to thyself! For it is then that the soul tastes and sees how sweet is her Lord Jesus. She experiences this sweetness when, in holy meditation, she nourishes this Divine Infant; when she covers Him with her tears; when she clothes Him with her holy longings; when she presses Him to her heart in the embrace of holy tenderness; when, in a word, she cherishes Him in the warmth of her glowing love. O happy Crib of Bethlehem in thee I find the King of glory: but happier still than thou, the pious soul which holds within itself Him whom thou couldst hold but corporally!

Now that we may pass on from this spiritual conception to the birth of our Lord Jesus; in other words, that we may pass from *Advent* to *Christmas*, we must unceasingly keep the eyes of our soul on Him who wishes to be born within us, and in whom the world is born to a new life. Our study and ambition should be, how best to become like Jesus, by imitating Him; for, though the imitation must needs be imperfect, yet we know from the Apostle that our heavenly Father Himself gives this as the sign of the elect - that they are made like to the *image of His Son* [Rm. 8: 29].

Let us, therefore, hearken to the invitation of the Angels, and go over to *Bethlehem* [Lk 2: 15]. We know what sign will be given to us of our Jesus - a *Child wrapped in swaddling-clothes*, and laid in a

*crib* [Ibid. 2: 22]. So that you, O Christians must become *children*; you must not disdain to be tied in the *bonds* of a spiritual childhood; you must come down from your proud spirit, and meet your Savior who has come down from heaven, and with Him hide yourselves in the humility of the *crib*. Thus will you begin, with Him, a new life. Thus will the *Light that goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day* [Prov. 4: 18] illumine your *path* the whole remaining length of your Journey. Thus the sight of God which leaves room for faith, which you receive at Bethlehem, will merit for you the face-to-face vision on Tabor, and prepare you for the blissful UNION, which is not merely *Light*, but the *plenitude* and *repose* of Love.

So far we have been speaking only of the living members of the Church, whether they began the life of grace during the holy Season of Advent, or were already living in the grace of the Holy Ghost when the ecclesiastical year commenced, and spent their Advent in preparing to be born with Jesus to a new year of higher perfection. But how shall we overlook those of our Brethren who are dead in sin; and so dead, that neither the coming of their Emmanuel, nor the example of the Christians throughout the universal Church earnestly preparing for that coming, could rouse them? No, we cannot forget them: we love them, and come to tell them (for even now they may yield to grace, and live), that *there hath appeared the goodness and kindness of God our Savior* [Tit. 3: 4]. If this volume of ours should perchance fall into the hands of any of those who have not yielded to the solicitations of grace, which press them to be converted to the sweet Babe of Bethlehem, their Lord and their God; who, instead of spending the weeks of Advent in preparing to receive Him at Christmas, lived them out, as they began them, in indifference and in sin: we shall, perhaps, be helping them to a knowledge of the grievousness of their state, by reminding them of the ancient discipline of the Church, which obliged all the Faithful, *under pain of being considered as no longer Catholics*, to receive Holy Communion on Christmas Day, as well as on Easter and Whit Sundays. We find a formal decree of this obligation given in the fifteenth Canon of the Council of Agatha (Agde) held in 506. We would also ask these poor sinners to reflect on the joy the Church feels at seeing, throughout the whole world, the immense number of her children, who still, in spite of the general decay of piety, keep the Feast of the birth of the Divine Lamb, by the sacramental participation of His Body and Blood.

Sinners! take courage; this Feast of Christmas is one of grace and mercy, on which all, both just and sinners, meet in the fellowship of the same glad Mystery. The heavenly Father has resolved to honor the Birthday of His Son, by granting pardon to all save those who obstinately refuse it. Oh! how worthy is the Coming of our dear Emmanuel to be honored by this divine amnesty!

Nor is it we that give this invitation; it is the Church herself. Yes, it is she that with divine authority invites you to begin the work of your new life on this day whereon the Son of God begins the career of His human life. That we may the more worthily convey to you this her invitation, we will borrow the words of a great and saintly Bishop of the Middle Ages, the pious Rabanus Maurus, who, in a homily on the Nativity of our Lord, encourages sinners to come and take their place, side by side with the just, in the stable of Bethlehem, where even the ox and the ass recognize their Master in the Babe who lies there.

'I beseech you, dearly beloved Brethren, that you receive with fervent hearts the words our Lord speaks to you through me on this

most sweet Feast, on which even infidels and sinners are touched with compunction; on which the wicked man is moved to mercy, the contrite heart hopes for pardon, the exile despairs not of returning to his country, and the sick man longs for his cure; on which is born the Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world, that is, Christ our Savior. On such a Birthday, he that has a good conscience rejoices more than usual; and he whose conscience is guilty fears with a more useful fear ... Yes, it is a sweet Feast, bringing true sweetness and forgiveness to all true penitents. My little children, I promise you without hesitation that every one who, on this day, shall repent from his heart, and return not to the vomit of his sins, shall obtain all whatsoever he shall ask; let him only ask with a firm faith, and not return to sinful pleasures.

'On this day are taken away the sins of the entire world: why needs the sinner despair? ... On this day of our Lord's Birth let us, dearest Brethren, offer our promises to this Jesus, and keep them, as it is written: *Vow ye, and pay to the Lord your God* [Ps. 75: 12]. Let us

make our promises with confidence and love; He will enable us to keep them. ... And when I speak of promises, I would not have anyone think that I mean the promise of fleeting and earthly goods. No - I mean, that each of us should offer what our Savior redeemed, namely, our soul. "But how," someone will say, "how shall we offer our souls to Him, to whom they already belong?" I answer: by leading holy lives, by chaste thoughts, by fruitful works, by turning away from evil, by following that which is good, by loving God, by loving our neighbor, by showing mercy (for we ourselves were in need of it, before we were redeemed), by forgiving them that sin against us (for we ourselves were once in sin), by trampling on pride, since it was by pride that our first parent was deceived and fell.' [Fourth Homily *On the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ*.]

It is thus our affectionate Mother the Church invites sinners to the Feast of the Divine Lamb; nor is she satisfied until her *House be filled* [Lk. 10: 2]. The grace of a *New Birth*, given her by the Sun of Justice, fills this Spouse of Jesus with joy. A new year has begun for her, and, like all that have preceded it, it is to be rich in flower and fruit. She renews her youth as that of an eagle. She is about to unfold another Cycle, or Year, of her mysteries, and to pour forth upon her faithful children the graces of which God has made the Cycle to be the

instrument. In this season of Christmas, we have the first-fruits of these graces offered to us; they are the knowledge and the love of our Infant God: let us accept them with attentive hearts, that so we may merit to advance, with our Jesus, *in wisdom and age and grace before God and men* [Ibid. 2: 52]. The Christmas Mystery is the gate of all the others of the rest of the year; but it is a gate which we may all enter, for, though most heavenly, yet it touches earth; since, as St. Augustine beautifully remarks in one of his sermons for Christmas [Eleventh Sermon *On the Nativity of our Lord*]: 'We cannot as yet contemplate the splendor of Him who was *begotten* of the Father *before the Day Star* [Ps. 109: 3]; let us, then, visit him who was born of the Virgin in the night-hour. We cannot understand how *His Name continued before the sun* [Ibid. 71: 17]; let us, then, confess that He hath set His tabernacle in her that is purer than *the sun* [Ibid. 18: 6]. We cannot as yet see the Only-Begotten Son dwelling in the Father's Bosom; let us, then, think on the *Bridegroom that cometh out of his bridechamber* [Ibid.]. We are not yet ready for the banquet of our heavenly Father; let us, then, keep to the Crib of Jesus, our Master [Is. 1: 3].

