

# **THE HOLY FAMILY**

## **THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD**

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- Sun.**      **The Feast of the Holy Family**  
**Dec. 27**    **THE CALL TO NEWNESS WITHIN THE FAMILIAR**  
A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Mon.**      **The Feast of the Holy Innocents**  
**Dec. 28**    **The last Christmas Homily of St. Archbishop Oscar Romero (Part 1): Christmas1979**
- Tues.**      **Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas**  
**Dec. 29**    **The last Christmas Homily of St. Archbishop Oscar Romero (Part 2): Christmas1979**
- Wed.**      **Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas**  
**Dec. 30**    **Christmas Homily of St John Paul 2 (1997)**
- Thurs.**      **Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas**  
**Dec. 31**    **Christmas Homily of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2005)**
- Fri.**      **The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**  
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A reflection based on a St. Basil's Treatise "On the Holy Spirit"

*Sunday*

## **The Call to Newness within the Familiar**

**A reflection based on a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller**

God calls us to be bearers of life, and new life, to our families and neighbors. We can only do this if we do not act so differently that others don't know how to relate to us. The life of an individual, or a family, of a small community always had to fit within the cultural framework that shapes our relationships to one another. So, we find advice in Scriptures that sometimes offend us—as when St. Paul speaks of a wife's submission to her husband or slaves' obedience to their masters. God can communicate a message of saving newness only by speaking to people “where they already are”, even if that sounds like acceptance of what will later be seen not to be the case or true.

The readings at today's Eucharist ask us to live at peace within our families and communities, and within present culture and society. If we are to be patient and know contentment, and share them with others, we need to remember that God does this for us as well. What is stressed is forgiveness and patience and acceptance of one another's differences.

Jesus, we are told, was obedient to Joseph and Mary, and yet suddenly he is off to the Temple learning from the rabbis teaching there. He not only answered their questions, as was expected, but asked them question, which was not expected. And he did all this without asking permission from his parents. They were upset when they found him. But he wasn't repentant. Yet he followed them back to Nazareth and resumed his obedience.

Our ordinary behavior is like a fine line and if we step off it we enter the new and unfamiliar. There are mysteries, not only in God but in each of us. There are potentials for newness in us that God will bring out, and in them lie gifts that we can share with others, if they are willing to accept that there are depths hidden within us to enrich lives and perhaps even change our society and culture. It is part of what Scripture calls “the mystery hidden from ages past but now revealed to God's holy ones”. Can you accept and believe that truth God tells us?

It seems that in practicing ordinary community virtues like forgiveness and patience we are doing more than overlooking others' faults or giving them a second chance, as we say. Like Mary we keep what surprises us in our heart and reflect on what God may be leading us to that is new. There are wonders we do not grasp hidden in spouses, children, neighbors and friends. Today these are presented as mysteries hidden in “family life”. Today's liturgy points this out to us and calls us to accept God's design for human life that makes all this happen.

We have to accept this about ourselves as much as about others. Are you willing to live the mysteries God has hidden, like precious pearls or treasures in a field, so that we can disclose not only old things but new ones, and realize they lead us to God?

*Monday*

## **The last Christmas Homily of St. Archbishop Oscar Romero: (Part 1): Christmas 1979**

I congratulate you, not only because it is Christmas, but because you are courageous. At a time when so many people are fearful and lock their doors, the open doors of our Cathedral are an image of confidence and hope in the Redeemer who is born to us. This evening, in this Cathedral, you are giving life to the meaning of Christmas. For in the midst of the world, with all its dangers, changes and fears, there is hope and happiness. This is not an unfounded or unreasonable front of courage, but it is the profound reality that flows from the heart of the Church and ought to be the powerful engine of the life of all Christians.

The angel speaks to the shepherds: I come to proclaim Good News to you, a Savior has been born to you. These words communicate the message that today is the beginning of something new and renewing. The child in the manger is an image of a God who wraps himself in human misery and gives meaning to suffering and pain. As the angels sing Glory to God, we see that we are invited to rejoice in the glory of God and therefore we should live with optimism and never weaken.

If we are looking for a profound explanation of the Christmas joy that many live but the majority do not understand, here it is: something new has entered the world. Christmas is always new and always news. Instead of contaminating our environment with pessimism, sadness, psychosis and fear, let us be inspired by the confidence of the angel and announce good news.

Today in El Salvador, torn apart by violence and injustice, we are experiencing a time of renovation, like an experience of childbirth. These sufferings will pass! The joy that will remain flows from the fact that we are Christian, with a faith in Christ which does not allow us to succumb to pessimism.

This is the message of Jesus: wrapped in swaddling clothes resting in a manger, poor like the poor of today. Christ, the poor one, is the image of a God who humbled himself. This is KENOSIS, a God who empties himself, is born poor and is buried after he was crucified like a common criminal.

Tonight, then, we do not look for God among the opulence of the world, or among the idolatries of wealth or of those eager for power or among the intrigues of the powerful and the wealthy. God is not there. Let us look for God poor among the poor. Here in El Salvador. Everywhere in the world.

*Tuesday*

## **The last Christmas Homily of St. Archbishop Oscar Romero: (Part 2): Christmas 1979**

This is the message of Jesus: wrapped in swaddling clothes, resting in a manger, poor with the poor. Today is the day we look for this child Jesus. But do not look for him only in the beautiful images of nativity sets but look also among the children lacking proper nutrition who have gone to sleep this evening with nothing to eat. Let us look for him among the poor newspaper boys who sleep in the doorways wrapped in the daily paper. Let us look for him in the shoeshine boys who perhaps have earned enough to buy a small gift for their mother. How sad is the history of these children. Yet, at Christmas Jesus takes on all of this. Everting is not joyful tonight. There is much suffering, much poverty.

The God of the poor has taken on all of this and He teaches that human suffering has a redemptive value. But, there is no redemption without the cross. This, of course does not mean that the poor should be passive. God desires social justice. God demands social justice

This is the Christ who is born in a stable and who teaches the poor nations, the innkeepers, those harvesting our coffee on cold nights that all of this pain has a meaning. When I think of the situation in El Salvador today, I know that we must be willing to die, but die with hope that arises from our Christian faith.

Oh, how I want to speak to you this Christmas about this Child in swaddling clothes and resting in the hay. We need to learn how to embrace the message of the poor Child, the humble Child, of the one who emptied himself to save the world. Tonight, we the poor people of El Salvador are very much like Jesus in Bethlehem, for we are poor people and we present ourselves to God in the same way that Mary and Joseph presented their poverty to God.

My dear brothers and sisters, there are three things that I want to call to your attention so that we might live these mysteries not only at Christmas but every day. This Child brings something new to our history, to our life, to El Salvador, to all nations. The Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and born in a manger gives meaning to poverty, pain and suffering. This child reminds us of our destiny: glory with God in the highest heaven. May we live close to the poor Jesus every day in the year to come.

A blessed and holy feast of the Nativity to you all. May we find Him incarnate in our own lives, in each other, and in the poor and vulnerable among us. Amen.

*Wednesday*

## **Christmas Homily of St John Paul 2 (1997)**

“Today, I bring you news of great joy“. This day which resounds in our Christmas liturgies does not refer only to the events which took place two thousand years ago and which changed the history of the world. It also refers to this holy season when we gather here in St Peters Basilica, in spiritual communion with all those gathering in different places throughout the world celebrating the joy of Christmas. Even in the furthest reaches of the five Continents there resounds the angelic words heard by the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Jesus was born in a stable, because as St Luke tells us “there was no room for them in the inn“. Mary, his Mother, and Joseph had not found a welcome in any house of Bethlehem. Mary had to lay the Savior of the world in a manger, the only cradle available for the Son of Man. This is the reality of the Nativity. Every year we need to return to this: Thus, we can rediscover it, thus we can experience it every time with unchanged wonder.

The birth of the Messiah! It is the central event in the history of humankind. A privileged witness, throughout the entire season of Advent, and also during Christmas, is the prophet Isaiah who, from the distant centuries directs his inspired gaze to this single, future night in Bethlehem. He speaks of this event as if he were an eyewitness. So too can we.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the Christmas message of grace is addressed to us! Listen, then! We are invited to pray, to keep vigil at this Holy Christmas season. I now repeat with joy: God’s love for us has been revealed! His love is grace and faithfulness, mercy and truth! By setting us free from the darkness of sin and death, he has become the firm and unshakable foundation of the hope of every human being. Our liturgies repeat with joyful insistence: Come, let us adore him! Come from every part of the world to contemplate what has taken place in the grotto. How unsearchably deep is the mystery of the Incarnation. Abundantly rich, in turn are the Christmas liturgies They cast successive rays of light on this great event which the Lord wants to make known to all who await him and seek him!

Peace to humanity! This is my Christmas wish. Dear Brothers and Sisters, during the entire Christmas Octave let us implore the Lord for this much needed Christmas grace. Let us pray that all humanity will come to know in the Son of Mary, born in Bethlehem, the Redeemer of the world who brings us the gift of love and peace. Amen.

*Thursday*

## **Christmas Homily of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2005)**

Bethlehem night is an expression of hope, a new reality, a unexpected event. The Child lying in a manger is truly the Son of God. God is not eternal solitude but rather a circle of mutual self -giving. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But there is more. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself, God from God, became man. To him the Father says: "You are my son". God's everlasting "today" has come down into the fleeting today of the world and lifted our momentary today into God's eternal today. God is so great that he can become small. God is so powerful that He can make Himself vulnerable and come to us as a defenseless child, so that we can love Him. God is so good that he can give up his divine splendor and come down into a stable, so that we might find Him, so that His goodness might touch us, give himself to us and continue to work through us. This is Christmas: "You are my Son, this day I have begotten you". God has become one of us, so that we can be with Him and become like Him. As a sign, He chose the Child lying in the manger: this is how God is. This is how we come to know him. And on every child shines the splendor of that first Christmas. It shines on every child, even on those still unborn.

Christmas is the season of light, a light shining in the darkness. Light means knowledge; it means truth, as contrasted with the darkness of falsehood and ignorance. Light gives us light, it shows the way. But light, as a source of heat means also love. Where there is love, light shines forth in the world; where there is hatred, the world remains in darkness. In the stable of Bethlehem there appeared the great light which the world awaits. The light of Bethlehem has never been extinguished. In every age it has touched men and women. Whenever people put their faith in that Child, charity also sprang up-charity towards others, loving concern for the weak and the suffering, the grace of forgiveness. From Bethlehem a stream of light, love and truth spreads through the centuries. If we look to the saints- from Paul and Augustine to Francis and Dominic, from Francis Xavier and Teresa of Avila to Mother Teresa of Calcutta-we see the flood of goodness, this path of light kindled ever anew by the mystery of Bethlehem, by that God who became a Child. We are called to follow that Child.

Friday

## MARY SHOWS US JESUS AND JESUS SHOWS US GOD

A reflection by Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens

Our world is God's gift to us of an unparalleled adventure. Think of space exploration and what it symbolizes for us of possibilities and hopes. But this one adventure doesn't stand alone as we use science to probe more and more deeply into the human organisms we are. What does the possibility for a refashioning of our humanity by genetic engineering suggest as opportunity and danger? This is a dangerous and sometimes frightening situation for us.

One problem is that though science seems to give us access to infinite horizons it can't deal with our most elementary questions about the meaning, and especially the ultimate meaning, of our lives. Even if death could be postponed what lies in wait for us when it comes? We insist on seeking, even finding, answers to these questions.

It is in this situation that Mary offers her Son to humanity as the only one who can show us "eternal life"—life's ultimate and never-ending meaning. Mary is the revelation of the Incarnation, the mystery by which God reveals to us what life can and should mean. She points us to Jesus, who for all ages will be the way and the truth and the life. If this means anything practical we need to come to Jesus and Mary points the way.

We are in the situation of the Magi. Through desert and darkness, they kept their eyes fixed on the light that eventually led them to Jesus. They found a house and in it they found Mary and the child. They fell down in adoration.

But they couldn't know that they had found what they sought apart from Mary and what she told them. She enables us all to grasp the meaning of the mystery of God's incarnation. This is symbolized by her title, "the God-Bearer", *theotokos*.

Mary is openness to God's call to newness. That is the heart of obedience and virgin-motherhood. Mary is compassion and gentleness; this is the heart of her human motherhood. Mary is love that never gives up or ceases to reflect on what she doesn't understand but only believes. She doesn't understand Jesus but she knows Jesus is "Son of the Most High" and so the revelation of God's care for us who are God's adopted children.

Today's world needs to rediscover the face of its Savior and of his mother. The world is glutted with philosophies and ideologies that don't answer our most vital needs and fundamental questions. Mary is the vibrant and living reality realized by believing God reveals in Jesus just what we need to do, as well as know. She shows us Christ as wholly divine and totally human. Mary is the safeguard of the realism of the Incarnation. She shows us facts not theories. She shows us how to live a genuinely "divine" life because she lives it through her son. That is how she is mother of our life in God, a life we live for one another and for the whole world of those wandering in darkness.

*Saturday*

## **The Adventure of Living a Spiritual Life**

### **A reflection based on St. Basil's Treatise on the Holy Spirit**

What do we mean when we speak of a person as being “spiritual”? We mean simply that the person is led by the Spirit of God, is called a child of God, and has taken on the likeness of the Son of God. Such persons no longer live by the standards of the world. A normal person has an ability to see. A spiritual person has the ability to judge by the Spirit's teaching. Living within one, the Spirit may cry out in our hearts—as when we cry “Father” to God, or the Spirit may use the words of Scripture to speak to another about how to live imitating Jesus.

But there is another way of thinking of these matters. Think of the Spirit as having in itself the power to use all your natural abilities and skills to do the work of God. The Spirit has within itself, as it were, all gifts. It wants to share with us those gifts that will make the potentials born within us into channels of new and divine life for others. St. Paul reminds us, “the eye can't say to the hand, ‘I can manage without you’, nor can the head say to the feet, ‘I don't need you’.” Nor can we say, because of the talents given us at birth, that we don't need the Spirit to serve the needs of others in ways that lead them to God.

All of us together make up the Body of Christ, and we do it in the unity that the Spirit gives. Because we are one we see one another's needs and are moved by love to serve one another according to the needs we see in one another. The various parts of the Body of Christ exist in a kind of spiritual fellowship that makes it natural to share each other's feelings and be mutually concerned. Again citing St. Paul, “When one member suffers all the members suffer and when one is honored all rejoice.”

The Father is seen in the Son and likewise the Son is seen in the Spirit. We cannot worship God without opening our minds to the divine light that is the Spirit. We learn this from the Lord's words to the woman of Samaria he met by a well. She wanted to know where one must adore God to find God's favor. He told her that one worships God “in Spirit” and in “truth”, which means everywhere that we perceive God's presence—e.g., in any child of God. Where do we perceive this? Think of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Wherever there is need and you can help meet that need in a loving and God-revealing fashion you can worship God by serving and loving that needy person.

What is a “spiritual life”? It is a life lived by allowing the Spirit to guide us to help one another in our needs. But our greatest need is spiritual. You can't help another meet this need if you don't let the Spirit transform your human talents and skills as instruments of spiritual healing, refreshment and new life. The first task is to learn how these talents can be so transformed and then let the in-dwelling Spirit carry out that transformation. This is the adventure that is living a “spiritual life”.