

**THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS
SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD**

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A reflection by Origen of Alexandria

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A reflection from St. Augustine's Commentary on I John

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A reflection from a letter by St. Cyprian of Carthage

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31 **SHARING IN ALL THAT GOD IS**
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Jan. 1 **HOW SERIOUS ARE YOU ABOUT UNITY WITH JESUS?**
A reflection from a homily by Basil of Seleucia

Sunday

ARE YOU SEEKING JESUS WHOLE HEARTEDLY?

A reflection from a Commentary on Luke by Origen of Alexandria

How often have we heard the Gospel tale of Jesus going about his business and of Mary and Joseph reacting, as any parent would, by thinking he was lost. They had been in Jerusalem for the Passover and Jesus was of an age to enter solemnly into the lifelong and personal obligation to keep all that God asks of those who have accepted a covenant to love God with all their heart, and mind and strength. What had he spent his time doing? He gave himself entirely to learning about God's will for Israel. Then it was time for the large group of pilgrims from Nazareth to begin the journey home. They started out together, as they always did, but nobody noticed Jesus wasn't with them.

Consider what we can learn about seeking and finding Jesus by following what Joseph and Mary did when they noticed that he had been left in Jerusalem. Where could they find him? They found him in God's Temple. What's more, they didn't find him just anywhere in the Temple, but among the great teachers of the Law who offered their learning freely to pilgrims at festival times. He was listening to their interpretations of Scripture, asking them questions, and then responding to the questions they addressed to him.

Jesus has been with us all our life. You always had a sense he was there for you. But what if you suddenly realized you had lost track of him, where would you go? You would go where God's word and will are being taught. You would go to the holy place where God is with those chosen especially as God's children. If we seek Jesus there, we will find him! Do you want to be with Jesus in a special way? Go to the Church and to those who teach about God and are themselves faithful to the Church's teaching. Anyone who would claim to be a teacher of God's will and way, but doesn't possess Christ personally is a teacher only in name. To be a teacher of God's Word and Wisdom you have to be with Jesus. So, find these teachers who are with Jesus and you will find Jesus.

Jesus was among the Doctors, learning from them by listening to them and asking questions of them. At this very moment, Jesus is present with the Doctors of the Gospels and is speaking to us through them. The doctors, we are told, were all amazed, and what amazed them were his answers to their questions. It was a usual teaching practice to ask the student questions, but Jesus could answer even questions the Doctors couldn't; he could answer the questions he had asked because through him God taught even the Doctors.

We are told that Moses has asked God questions and that God has answered him. So, we need to listen to Jesus and let him put questions to us, perhaps ones we can't answer. Maybe we want to know in which group of people he is found right now and with whom we can learn his way. This has to be done all the time and not in a passing or occasional way. You can never find where Jesus waits for you if you act like that. Mary said, when she found him, "We have been looking anxiously for you!", but he answered, "Didn't you know I would have to be in my Father's House"? Try to be as concerned to find Jesus, that Joseph and Mary were. *Keep looking for those who teach the way to God and always try to live like Jesus.*

Monday

SEEING, HEARING AND TOUCHING THE WORD OF LIFE
A reflection from St. Augustine's Commentary on I John

"I speak of what has existed from the beginning, of what we have heard, and have seen with our own eyes; we have watched and touched it with our hands: The Word of Life." How could anyone actually touch The Word unless it had been made flesh and come to dwell among us? But this Word, which was made flesh and has dwelt among us, could be touched and still can.

He began to be flesh from the flesh of the Virgin Mary. Yet this wasn't the beginning of the Word. The Word had existed from the beginning. What we hear in this Letter of John we also heard in John's Gospel. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God"*.

We can all gain a kind of knowledge of the Word by hearing about him, as we just have. But receiving human words, like the phrase "the Word of Life", is not the same as touching the body of Jesus Christ. Yet we are also told that *"this life was made visible"*; that is, Christ, who is the Word of Life has been made visible to us; isn't the visible touchable?

We know now that the Life which is in Christ, and which has been given to us, can actually be perceived only by the heart. Thus, for the healing of hearts, and so they may be able to perceive this life, it is made visible in various ways to human eyes. The Word and Life are perceived, and received, only by and in the heart, and yet we are led to them through their presence in the flesh and that is perceived by bodily vision and received in sacrament.

All this is possible because the Word itself became flesh in a way visible to mortal eyes. This was done so that the heart might be healed by what was seen by our eyes and so become capable of receiving the Word in an even fuller way. Listen to John again: *"We saw it and we are giving testimony, telling you of the eternal life which was with the Father and has been made manifest to us."* And then he says: *"What we have seen and heard we are telling you"*. Who is doing this? John is doing it and telling us about it.

Now let me repeat these words: What we have seen and heard we are telling you, my dear friends. John and the other disciples saw the Lord present in the flesh and they heard his words and then repeated them to us. We did not see the Lord and we didn't even see his disciples, but we have seen those whose hearts were healed by him and by his disciples, and then were able to receive in their hearts the Word. Do you think you are less favored than they were?

Why did they tell us what they did? They answer, *"that you too may be in union with us"*. That means union, not just with them but with the Word and with the Father who sent the Word. What was worked through Jesus, by God's grace, is worked through his disciples. We share the same faith and so are in union with them. We are all in fellowship with Jesus Christ, and so the Heavenly Father.

John adds: *"We write this so that your joy may be complete"*. It is the same fullness of joy, the same fellowship, the same unity, the same love that were made flesh in Jesus Christ and in St. John. Now they are made flesh and are seen and touched in us.

Tuesday

THE ALL-EMBRACING LOVE OF CHRIST

A reflection taken from a letter by St. Cyprian of Carthage

The martyrdom of children marked the very beginning of Christ's life. For his name's sake, all those of two years old and under were put to death. Too young to fight in the usual ways, they were still made able to win a martyr's crown. By their innocence, they were made able to bear witness to the innocence of all those who shed their blood for Christ. When even such as these are made martyrs, witnesses, clearly no one is immune from the peril of persecution and witnessing. Clearly, in the same way, no one is separated from the love and care of Christ that makes one a martyr. Martyrdom is not a work we do and not a glory we earn; these are gifts given us freely and unearned by God.

What a shameful thing it would be if Christ's servants—God's servants, were to recoil from suffering what their Master suffered. We are living in a world dominated by sin and must not be unwilling to suffer the consequences. It is a gift from God. We ought not to refuse the gift, even if we are able. The Son of God suffered in order to make us children of God. We must not refuse to persevere in that glorious status by suffering. We may have to put up with the world's hatred, but so did Christ and so did the holy children.

Listen to Christ: *"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. But you are not of the world; I chose you out of it, and therefore it hates you. Remember the saying I gave you, 'The servant is not greater than the Master'. If they persecute me, they will persecute you also."*

Such suffering is not due to what we make ourselves to be, but what God has given us along with the gifts of life and birth. There is no excuse for a servant to avoid what the martyrs had to endure. Our Lord and God practiced all he taught. We can't listen to the teaching and not be willing to live by it, and die by it.

Let none of us be so intimidated by the prospect of future persecution, or even the coming of the Antichrist, as not to be armed by the example of Christ, and the rest of God's servants, against whatever may happen. What if the Antichrist comes? Won't Christ come also? The enemy may rage and inflict wounds, but Christ comes to heal.

There is no one who can take us from Christ's arms for he is our Good Shepherd. We know what to fear—that we should separate ourselves from God and God's Christ. There is nothing else to fear. The love and care we receive is a free gift and no persecution comes without that gift coming too.

Wednesday

LEARNING TO TREASURE GOD'S GIFTS TO US

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

The goodness and humanity of God our Savior have appeared. Let us give thanks to God for such a great consolation in the midst of a life that seems so unhappy and wandering, seems an exile. Before the humanity of God appeared, God's goodness was concealed. Of course, God was always good—for God's mercy is forever—but how were people to know that? People had no faith in promises which weren't confirmed by their own experience. The Lord had spoken through the prophets in many different ways and assured us that he was thinking thoughts of peace and not of affliction. But people were too aware of their afflictions to notice the rest. Now, at last, God has given evidence of the most convincing kind, for we do at least believe our own eyes.

God has come to live with us. What do we see now? Peace hasn't been only promised but has been sent; it is peace with God and with ourselves. What was promised has been given and more than we expected. It is as though God had sent a bulging purse down from heaven and then let it be torn open in Christ's passion—and behold it contained the price of our redemption and reconciliation.

It seemed only a small purse, but it was very full. "*Unto us a child is given*". It is a child, but one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead and of humanity. When the fullness of time came, then the fullness of the Godhead came and also recognition of the gift of humanity.

God came in a human body because only in this way could he show himself to those who live in the flesh and are flesh and blood. That was true from the beginning. By the sight of our humanity made God's own we can be convinced of God's goodness and of the goodness of his gift of humanity. God has taken my human nature. God has assumed not only my misery, but my humanity. That demonstrates the depths of his compassion and the depth of his goodness—in redemption and in creation.

"O Lord, what is man that you are mindful of us? Why should you set your heart on us?" This ought to make us stop and think. We should realize how much God cares for us. It should teach us how God thinks of us and our humanity. It should teach us how God feels for us. We mustn't draw conclusion only from our own sufferings, but remember God's humanity and God's sufferings. We must learn from what he became for our sakes, how highly we have been exalted. God's humanity will be a revelation of his goodness to us.

Truly great is the goodness of God, and it is manifest in his humanity. We learn about its goodness through him. He has given us the most positive proof of goodness by the pains he took to both to enrich our humanity and to add his divine dignity to it.

Thursday

RECOVERING SPIRITUAL VIGOR

A reflection based on a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Am I speaking to anyone suffering from spiritual weariness? Let such a person go to Bethlehem to see the Word of God. In your mind you can picture the living and creative word of God lying in a manger for you. What could better strengthen hope and set one's love aflame? You will see a word you can trust. In deep silence the Almighty Word has made its way to a manger and spoken to us by silence. Listen to this loving and mysterious silence for it speaks of peace.

Too many say foolish things. "With our tongues, we can do great things; our lips are good friends to us and make us our own masters". At Bethlehem, the Word sums up all that truly makes for our salvation and brings about justice and right in a brief word.

God couldn't speak to us as spiritual but only as fleshly, and so the Word was made flesh so that all flesh might not only be able to hear it but see that it was God's word. In wisdom, the world didn't come to know God, so Divine Wisdom became what seemed foolish—it became a word even the uneducated, even the stupid, could learn. I give you thanks, Lord of Heaven and of earth, because you hid wisdom from the wise and showed it to little ones. It is with little ones that this Little One rests in quiet and humility.

See why the Lord can say of little ones, "Behold me, and the children which God has given me". The Holy Spirit teaches us that of such little ones is the Kingdom of Heaven. But if we want to be made little again we have to make our way to Bethlehem and look with all earnestness upon the Word, which has been made flesh and become a little one for our sake.

We learn the Wisdom of God from the humility with which He comes to us. In this all-embracing virtue, and in silence, we find the supreme wisdom who willed to know nothing but humility and to become its teacher. Blessed the faith of the shepherds, who saw all this and weren't scandalized. Seeing how he emptied himself completely for them, they gave Him in response the whole of their affections. You too will find that infant if you go to Bethlehem. Take care that nothing of his poverty and lowliness offend you.

Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes, and our mother Grace covers him with the appearances of the sacraments of salvation, even as our mother Wisdom covers him with the figures preachers use. Faith prepares us for the eternal life in which we will see Him as He is. Be patient and cherish that word implanted in you which calls you to salvation.

May all the wealth of Christ's word dwell in you. Love and remember the Incarnate Word. Sing of Him happily and faithfully as you see him clothed in the swaddling bands that wrap him now, but will be removed to reveal his glory, and our sharing in it. This will restore our spiritual vigor. To Him be glory and honor forever.

Friday

SHARING IN ALL THAT GOD IS

A reflection from the Refutation of all Heresies by St. Hippolytus

Our faith doesn't rest on empty words. We aren't to be carried away by mere whim or taken in by specious arguments. However, we don't want to turn a deaf ear when a message comes from the Power of God. This is what God entrusted to his Word. He delivered it to humankind in order to cure us of our disobedience, not by reducing us to slavery or using force but by calling upon our freedom. God's is a call to liberty.

In these "last days," the Heavenly Father sent the Word in person. He no longer wanted to have it spoken by prophets or proclaimed in obscure ways. He didn't want it to be understood dimly. So he instructed the Word to reveal himself openly. He wanted people to be won over by what they actually saw.

We know the story. He took a body from the Virgin and so remade our fallen nature. We know that he was of the same clay as we are. Otherwise, a precept about following our teacher would have been given in vain. He wanted us to realize that he was like us, and so he worked hard and experienced hunger and thirst and slept. Without protest, he endured his passion, submitted to death, and then showed himself as risen from the grave. He showed us his own humanity to keep us from losing heart when suffering comes our way. He made us look forward to receiving the same reward as he did.

When we have come to know God as God is, our bodies will be immortal and incorruptible like our souls. We who have paid homage to the Heavenly King during our life on earth will receive the Kingdom of Heaven. We will be friends of God and co-heirs with Christ. We won't any longer be subject to wrong desires or passions or disease or death. We will share the Divine Nature.

God, by the very fact that we were created human, made us sharers in suffering. But when we have been made immortal sharers in his Godhead, he promises that his attributes shall be ours. This explains the saying: Know yourself! Thus, you will learn to know the God who made you in his own image. When a human person is called by God, it is a call to know God and be known by God.

It isn't for us to be at enmity with one another. We are to change our way of life without delay. Christ, who is God, exalted above all, has determined to renew our nature by washing away our sins. In deciding to do this he gave proof of his love for us. If we obey his holy commandments and imitate his goodness on our own he will honor us by making us like He is. God doesn't lack means. For the sake of his own glory, he will admit us to a share in divinity.

Saturday

HOW SERIOUS ARE YOU ABOUT BEING ONE WITH JESUS? A reflection from a homily by Basil of Seleucia

Born of the Virgin Mother of God, the Creator, and Lord all shared our humanity. He had a real body and soul even though he had no part in our misdeeds. He committed no sin, says Scripture, and no falsehood ever came from his mouth. O holy womb, in which God was received, through which our sin was effaced, in which God became human while remaining God! When he was received by a mother's arms, he didn't leave the bosom of his Heavenly Father. God isn't divided as he carries out his will; God saves without suffering division.

There isn't a real need to enumerate the prophecies foretelling Christ. Mary brings forth the flower of Jesse and gifts no one can worthily praise. If Paul could say of the other saints that the world wasn't worthy of them, what can anyone say of the Mother who outshines all the martyrs as the sun does the stars? Let us echo Gabriel's cry of joy: "Rejoice, most highly favored one!"

Immanuel has come into the world he had made. God from all eternity is a child conceived in Mary. She was radiant with joy and amazement. The gifts the Spirit gave to Elizabeth and to her son, John, weren't denied to Mary. Mary spent nine months in meditation on all that God was doing to fulfill the hopes of Israel through her; she certainly would have us imitate her as we contemplate Christ's coming and the fact that the Spirit has caused Christ to come to be and begin to develop in us too.

Mary spent these months exploring the riches contained in such hidden and unobvious ways in what Israel had gradually learned to hope it could become for God, and even for the nations. Isn't that a meditation we are called to immerse ourselves in with Mary? She did it without interrupting her work to help Elizabeth with the daily chores that a 90-year-old first-time pregnant woman could find overwhelming. This too was a subject for meditation and thanksgiving. Mary was blessed because in her God was doing such great "little things" for Elizabeth and others. Haven't we received the same grace in our way?

Mary received the sages from the east and her reflections then gave new depth to God's promises to draw all to Jerusalem, to God's House and presence. She could sing to herself the hymn that the angels had sung to the shepherds and imagine its fulfillment in the ages to come. The Mother of God and of the Lord of all creation pondered in her heart and her heart was filled with gladness at what the sages from the East signified.

What was the focus of all her thought and prayer, whether in petition for the strength to do the daily deeds of love that fell to her even while thinking constantly of the child growing within her? And the child's birth simply brought all this to fulfillment. We learn from her what the vocation to contemplation is and what wonders it can bring us, to give us joy and to give us reason to share that joy with all near us. Are we ready to contemplate seriously as Mary did?