

**THE SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FAMILY  
&  
THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD  
(NEW YEARS DAY)**

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- Sun.      The Sunday of the Holy Family  
Dec. 29    **GOD'S LIBERATION AND HUMAN LIBERATION**  
            A reflection by Jurgen Moltmann
- Mon.      THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD  
Jan.1      **MARY'S PRESENCE WITH JESUS**  
            A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini
- Tues.      Memorial of Sts. Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen  
2          **THE EQUALITY CREATED BY GOD'S LOVE**  
            A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nazianzen
- Wed.      Christmas Weekday Before Epiphany  
3          **THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD LEADS TO CORRUPTION**  
            From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on 7 January 2020
- Thurs.     Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton  
4          **BELONGING TO GOD**  
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- Fri.      Memorial of St. John Neumann  
5          **SEEKING TOTAL DEDICATION TO GOD'S SERVICE**  
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- Sat.      Christmas Weekday Before Epiphany  
6          **JESUS OF NAZARETH, "EXALTED" IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**  
            from DOMINUM ET VIVIFICANTEM, Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in  
            the life of the Church and the World by Pope John Paul II, 1986

*Sunday*

## **GOD'S LIBERATION AND HUMAN LIBERATION**

### **A reflection by Jurgen Moltmann**

To us a child is born, to us a son is given. The government is upon his shoulders." The liberator is a child and will lead us to a new world of peace. That is why his rule means life and not death, peace and not war, freedom and not oppression. Why does sovereignty lie on the defenseless, innocent and hope-filled shoulders of this child? God has become a child and one who grew up to pray on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

In 1934 columns of troops loyal to Adolph Hitler sang as they marched: "One day will be the day of revenge! That day we shall be free!" But that zeal led only to Auschwitz and to Stalingrad. Rulers have always liked to link their names with peace. They, and all liberators, have come and gone. Their zeal did not work the will of the Lord and they have come and gone.

When we celebrate the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus we like to think that this models a family which can bring peace to its members, and to all who live as its members live together. But it actually brought Mary and Jesus to the cross, as perhaps it had Joseph. What it did was model turning to God and giving one's entire life into God's hands. It points us beyond the sociological reality we call a family and to the People within which the family exists and beyond all human creations. Only in God is there true peace and fullness of life!

There is nothing wrong with dreams—if they are good. The prophets gave a People who lived in darkness, and us as well, an unforgettable dream. We should remain true to it. But that dream is embodied in a mere child. In the child, we can see only a shadowy outline of what we hope for. He is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He is Jesus Christ, the child that lay in a manger, the preacher on the mount, the tormented one hanging on the cross, the risen Liberator.

According to the New Testament the dream of a liberator and the dream of true peace, are not merely dreams. The liberator is already present and his power already works among us. We can follow him and so begin to make visible something of the peace, righteousness, and liberty that is his Kingdom. He will complete it. But not in the form of the world we know. He calls us to participate in the creation of a new world—new in every way.

If it is new we can't look to human creations to bring it about—the creations, for instance, that we call families or nations or cultures or civilizations. We can only look through these to something that lies beyond them and that no one actually knows how to describe concretely. The zeal of the Lord will create this! We mustn't cling to our human creations, no matter how noble we think they can be if only we could act rightly and with love. We are called to look beyond. Our families are called, like the Holy Family, to look beyond all the human imagination can encompass. We are called to follow the child in the manger, and in Nazareth and in Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, and look beyond everything else to the Heavenly Father, as we inadequately call our God. God will lead us beyond our imaginings to a Kingdom that is beyond all kingdoms like we can imagine and so to a peace that is the fullness of life. That is what Mary and Joseph taught Jesus, and what Jesus taught them. Let us teach one another. We will experience where love leads.

Monday

## MARY'S PRESENCE WITH JESUS

A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini

From the first hour to the last, Jesus' life is enfolded in the harness of his mother. The strongest part of their relationship is her silence. Nevertheless, if we accept the word Jesus speaks to her, simply as they arise from each situation, it seems almost invariably as though a cleft gaped between him and her. Take the incident in the temple of Jerusalem. He was, after all, only a child when he stayed behind without a word, at a time when the city was overflowing with pilgrims of all nationalities, and when not only accidents but every kind of violence was to be expected. Yet his reply expresses only amazement. No wonder they failed to understand.

It is the same with the wedding feast at Cana. He is seated with the wedding party, apparently poor people who haven't much to offer. They run out of wine. Pleadingly, Mary turns to her son: *"They have no wine."* But he replies, *"What would you have me do? My hour has not yet come!"* In other words, I must obey the voice of my Father. Soon he does save the situation, but only because suddenly his hour has come. Another time, Mary comes to see him, and he is told that she is seeking him. *"Who is my mother and brother?"*, he answers, *"Whoever does the will of God."* No doubt he goes out to her and receives her with love, but the words remain and we feel a shock at his reply. He lives in a kind of remoteness.

Even his reply to the words, *"Blessed is the womb that bore you!"* sometimes interpreted as an expression of nearness, could also mean distance. And finally, on Calvary, his mother under the cross, thirsting for a word, her heart crucified with him, he says to her, with a glance at John, *"Woman, behold your son"* and to John, *"Behold, your mother"*. An expression of a dying son's solicitude for his mother's future yet her heart must have cringed. Once again she is directed away from him. Christ must face the fullness of his ultimate hour, huge, terrible, all-demanding, but alone.

Everything that affected Jesus affected his mother. Mary believed, blindly. Again and again, she has to confirm that belief, and each time with more difficulty. For years she had to combat an only too natural confusion. Who was this "Holy One" whom she, a mere girl, has borne and suckled and known in all his helplessness? She had to struggle against the pain of seeing him steadily outgrow her love and even flee it to a realm of ineffable remoteness. Not only did she have to accept this but rejoice in it as the fulfillment of God's will.

It is this heroic faith which places her at Christ's side in the work of redemption. What is demanded of us, as of her, is a constant wrestling in faith with the mystery of God and with the evil resistance of the world. Mary's vital depths of faith supported the Lord throughout his life and death. Again and again, he left her behind to feel the blade of the sword piercing her heart. But each time, in a surge of faith, she caught up with Him and enfolded him anew. Until at last he severed the very bond of sonship by appointing another, to take his place. On the highest, thinnest pinnacle of creation, Jesus stood alone. From the depths of her co-agony on Golgotha, Mary, with a final bound of faith, accepted this double separation, and, once again, stood beside him. Indeed, *"Blessed is the one who has believed!"*

Tuesday

## THE EQUALITY CREATED BY GOD'S LOVE

### A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nazianzen

Do we wonder how it is that we come to exist, to breathe, to think and understand, and to know God? Do we wonder how it is we can hope for the Kingdom of Heaven and the full and perfect vision of God? We know we are children of God. We know we are joint heirs with Christ. We know we are even made divine ourselves. To what and to whom do we owe all this?

Let me speak of ordinary things. Look around you and see the sky's beauty, the sun's course through the day, the moon's disk and the myriads of stars. Who has established the whole universe in order and in harmony? By whose gift do we contemplate all this?

Who has given us rain, crops to cultivate, food and drink? What of our arts and crafts, of the homes we live in and the laws and government, of our civilization, of our families and friends? And who has given us the animals we either train for our service or raise for our sustenance? In short, who has appointed us to be lords and masters of the earth and made us superior to all the rest?

Surely, this was done by God, who now asks us to show kindness to all fellow human beings in return for these accumulated benefits. We have received so much from God and hope for still more. Shouldn't we be ashamed to refuse him this one request, this love for our fellows?

He is our God and Master. Yet he is not ashamed to be called our Father. Are we to refuse to acknowledge our own kin? Let us not be unjust stewards of all that God has given us. If we made ourselves unjust we will recall the words of Peter. "Shame on you, who withhold from others what is their due! Make God's impartial justice your model, and then there will be no poor among you."

Why should we wear ourselves out amassing and guarding wealth, while others toil in poverty? Why should we hear stinging threats like those of Amos the prophet? "*Listen to this, you who say, 'When will the new moon be over so we can sell grain? When will the sabbath be past so we can get back to business?' "* It would be much better if we modeled ourselves on the foremost and greatest commandment of the God who sends rain on the just and the unjust and makes the sun shine on all alike.

At the creation, when the soil had not yet been tilled, God gave the freedom of the earth, with its springs, rivers and woods, to all the inhabitants of dry lands. The air he gave to birds and the sea to water creatures and upon all he bestowed life's basic necessities in abundance. Nothing had to be acquired by force, restricted by law, or separated by boundaries. Though everything was given to be enjoyed by all in common, the abundance of the supply was not diminished for any of them. All creatures were equal in value and held equally in honor by God.

God has given us an example. Many have failed to follow it. God came among us as one of us and showed us how to love all equally. He taught us that we can give to all knowing that God will give to us all we truly need. God is displaying his bounty and goodness, and we only have but to imitate his example.

*Wednesday*

## **THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD LEADS TO CORRUPTION**

### **From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on 7 January 2020**

Christian life is to remain in God following the Holy Spirit, not the spirit of the world, which leads to corruption, and does not distinguish good from evil. Pope Francis told the faithful during his homily at Santa Marta on Tuesday, 7 January.

Commenting on a passage from the First Letter of Saint John the Apostle in which the evangelist takes Jesus' advice to "Remain in God", the Pope said that one can "be in the most sinful cities, in the most atheistic societies, but if one's heart remains in God", this man and this woman bring salvation.

Many Christians today identify the Holy Spirit only with a dove and do not know that it is the Holy Spirit who "makes you remain in the Lord, is the guarantee, he is the strength to remain in the Lord".

The spirit of the world, Pope Francis said, is contrary to the Holy Spirit; it not only leads to corruption but also to an inability to distinguish between good and evil. The spirit of the world is forgetting that sin itself "does not turn you away from God if you realize it and ask forgiveness, but the spirit of the world makes you forget what sin is".

Indeed, for many Christians their hearts are like a road, "and they do not know who comes and goes", this is because "they do not know how to examine what happens inside".

In order to avoid falling into the spirit of the world and to discern it from the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis suggested that we ask ourselves a few times a day — every day — what has happened in my heart? Where the particular feelings and thoughts are coming from: "From the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God". And "Will this make me good or will it throw me down the road of worldliness that is unconsciousness?".

At the end Pope Francis said to ask for "the grace to remain in the Lord" and that we pray that our heart may "not be a road", but rather the meeting point between us and God.

*Thursday*

## **BELONGING TO GOD**

### **A reflection taken from a homily on the St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton webpage**

When the Virgin Mary said her yes to God she couldn't imagine exactly what it would cost her personally. Elizabeth Seaton decided that she wanted God and that God wanted her to belong to the Catholic Church. She had been raised as an Episcopalian and had read the bible daily but hungered for more of Christ than she found there and was convinced that she would find it in the Catholic church.

How she experienced this longing can be seen from an incident she recounted. She was on a trip to Europe. She was walking down a street when a priest passed carrying the Blessed Sacrament to a sick person. Suddenly she fell on her knees and cried out to God to bless her. "Bless me if you are there! My whole soul desires only you!" She used her shipboard time returning to the U.S. visiting with an Italian knowledgeable of his faith. He taught her a great deal and by the time she had gotten back, she was determined to join the Church.

This caused her family to ostracize her and leave her on her own to raise the five children now that their father had died of tuberculosis. She did it as a journey of faith. People close to her remember her traveling from her parish to another on Sunday so she could receive the Blessed Sacrament twice. This reflected her reaction to her first communion after becoming Catholic: "At last, God is mine and I am His! I have received him!"

She moved to Baltimore and with the help of a priest there founded a group of women to work in education and for the poor. She did raise her children and gave them a good education despite her family's refusal to help. She did find ways to make the group she founded a success. "I can remember a time, when I was still in Anglicanism, when my heart knew that I must enter the Catholic Church. I knew at that moment that this would be the only way to continue to say "yes" to the work the Lord was doing in my life. At that moment I didn't know how it would take place, when it would happen, or what would be the ultimate destiny of my decision. I knew, however, that it would come".

Without resources, the Lord enabled her to draw other women to work for the poor and to educate children. She founded the first free school, for children of any faith, in this country. The heart of this all was the Eucharist and the study of Holy Scripture. She didn't have a great deal of time to do what she felt called to do. Her husband had died of tuberculosis and she died of it too. At her death, she was only 46 years old. We celebrate her feast day on the very day of her death, January 4<sup>th</sup>.

A prayer found in her papers shows us the spirit that animated her: "Lord, If I am walking in the right way, impart the grace to stay in that way. If I am wrong, teach my heart to find the better way!" She had great trust in God's grace as leading her personally. We too can live truly in God only by a like trust.

*Friday*

## **SEEKING TOTAL DEDICATION TO GOD'S SERVICE**

### **From the Seminary Diary of St. John Neumann**

“Reason and revelation, the nature of our soul and intimate and multifaceted connections between all things teach us that the present is tied to the future in a way that cannot be dissolved. Everything that we have and do has its consequences and these extend to infinity. One day we will reap what we have sown. Regarding that which we can expect as recompense, we know it won't be insignificant. It may be that the good or bad thoughts that we cultivate, or the good or bad passions that we sustain, that the good or bad actions we do will darken one another, weaken one another, or lead us to forget them, but there is no passage of time that can cancel out the traces they leave in our souls.

Actually, after years and years or even centuries, they can come to life again as vivid and powerful as ever, and as able to cause us shame or contentment, pleasure or displeasure. And we will be just as wise or stupid about them, just as good or evil, just as perfect or imperfect. It will be just as easy or difficult to think prudently and live a virtuous life and reflecting on the past will be just as agreeable or disagreeable (as it was). Reason and Scripture teach us to believe that the Lord, our Judge, will sharpen our spirit's perception on That Day and will cause us to see finally the thoughts, imaginings, and deeds we have long held out of sight and buried in the abyss we call forgetfulness.

If, then, the present is connected with so much precision and so inextricably to the future, then we ought and are able to look at the present and deal with it always by considering the future. That is what every wise person does, and every priest does it in a special way. I am not ever going to lose sight of the future! The future is going to be in my view every day of my life so that each day becomes a preparation for eternity. In this way, I will sow each day some good seed for the future harvest.

O Jesus, my Lord, you have already given me a most powerful longing for you! Come to me and rest in me always. Take me from this valley of tears so that I may be able to praise you forever with your saints. Jesus, grant that I may die for you! I want to be your disciple and be near you forever! Yet, during this very Christmas time when you seem so near, I told a lie. And then I got upset and forgot my morning prayer. O my God, where will I end up? Turn my consolation into repentance so that I may regret my sins. My great vice is laziness, and even laziness in carrying out the duties that go with my state in life. O Jesus, give me greater humility and more fervent zeal! You know I want to let go of everything that gets in the way of following you. I was carried away by vanity hearing my language skills praise by an English-speaking visitor. Give me the humility to acquire basic virtue. O most wise, O most holy One, guide my tongue.

*Saturday*

## **JESUS OF NAZARETH, "EXALTED" IN THE HOLY SPIRIT from DOMINUM ET VIVIFICANTEM, Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and the World by Pope John Paul II, 1986**

Even though in his hometown of Nazareth Jesus is not accepted as the Messiah, nonetheless, at the beginning of his public activity, his messianic mission in the Holy Spirit is revealed to the people by John the Baptist. The latter, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, foretells at the Jordan the coming of the Messiah and administers the baptism of repentance. He says: "I baptize you with water; he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." John the Baptist foretells the Messiah-Christ not only as the one who "is coming" in the Holy Spirit but also as the one who "brings" the Holy Spirit, as Jesus will reveal more clearly in the Upper Room. Here John faithfully echoes the words of Isaiah, words which in the ancient Prophet concerned the future, while in John's teaching on the banks of the Jordan, they are the immediate introduction to the new messianic reality. John is not only a prophet but also a messenger: he is the precursor of Christ. What he foretells is accomplished before the eyes of all. Jesus of Nazareth too comes to the Jordan to receive the baptism of repentance. At the sight of him arriving, John proclaims: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." He says this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. At the same time, he confesses his faith in the redeeming mission of Jesus of Nazareth. On the lips of John the Baptist, "Lamb of God" is an expression of truth about the Redeemer no less significant than the one used by Isaiah: "Servant of the Lord."

Thus, by the testimony of John at the Jordan, Jesus of Nazareth, rejected by his own fellow citizens, is exalted before the eyes of Israel as the Messiah, that is to say, the "One Anointed" with the Holy Spirit. And this testimony is corroborated by another testimony of a higher order, mentioned by the three Synoptics. For when all the people were baptized and as Jesus, having received baptism, was praying, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove" and at the same time "a voice from heaven said "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

This is a Trinitarian theophany that bears witness to the exaltation of Christ on the occasion of his baptism in the Jordan. It not only confirms the testimony of John the Baptist but also reveals another more profound dimension of the truth about Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. It is this: the Messiah is the beloved Son of the Father. His solemn exaltation cannot be reduced to the messianic mission of the "Servant of the Lord." In the light of the theophany at the Jordan, this exaltation touches the mystery of the very person of the Messiah. He has been raised up because he is the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. The voice from on high says: "My Son."

The theophany at the Jordan clarifies only in a fleeting way the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, whose entire activity will be carried out in the active presence of the Holy Spirit. This mystery would be gradually revealed and confirmed by Jesus himself by means of everything that he "did and taught." In the course of this teaching and of the messianic signs that Jesus performed before he came to the farewell discourse in the Upper Room, we find events and words that constitute particularly important stages of this progressive revelation.