



The Diocese of Banjul **NEWSLETTER**

Incorporating The Catholic Newsletter

**WISHING OUR ESTEEMED READERS
AND THE GAMBIAN POPULACE A HAPPY
CHRISTMAS WITH A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR**

COVER STORY

The Christmas Hope

Abundant God's Love and Humanity's Redemption

See Page 4



**38th Annual Pilgrimage to the Shrine
of Our Lady of Peace, Kunkujiang Mariama**
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Pray for us.

Saturday 7th December, 2024



EDITORIAL: A RARE GIFT EVIDENT AT CHRISTMAS

Our Gift of Unity in Diversity and The Growing Landscape of Tribal Discord Fueled by Our Politicians

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DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER

Our Mission and Vision

We entertain, we encourage, and we enlighten. More so, Diocese of Banjul Newsletter gives you the tools you need to feed your faith life, nurture our society and relationships, care for your family, and bring the light of Christ to others. We connect with our readers through personal stories of triumphs and struggles, joys and challenges, and the lighter side of Christian living.

Dioocese of Banjul Newsletter is a source of support and encouragement for our society, especially those who love their faith, those who struggle with their faith, and those who long to learn more about the richness of Catholic tradition. More so, we strive to build a healthy society for the welfare of all.

Dioocese of Banjul Newsletter seeks the positive in the world and in our Church. It emphasizes those things that our society is doing right and well, as a means of inspiring and encouraging others to do the same. It is hope-filled, optimistic, and forward-looking. In the main, the newsletter moves our readers beyond inspiration and toward action, and gives them the information, tools, and resources they need to answer God's call to holiness and bring the light of Christ to others.



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EDITORIAL

A RARE GIFT EVIDENT AT CHRISTMAS

Our Gift of Unity in Diversity and The Growing Landscape of Tribal Discord Fueled by Our Politicians

As we celebrate another Christmas in The Gambia, we find ourselves drawn to a profound and timeless truth: unity amidst diversity which is not just a gift but a calling. It is a higher principle that reflects the essence of human existence and the interconnectedness of all people. This harmony, exemplified in the mutual participation of Muslims and Christians in each other's festivities, is both a sociological marvel and a philosophical affirmation of our shared humanity.

Unity in diversity echoes the principle of Ubuntu: "I am because we are." It recognizes that our individual and collective flourishing depends on our ability to live harmoniously despite our differences. The diversity of tribes, religions, and cultures in The Gambia is not a weakness but a testament to the richness of human life, akin to the different stands of a web where each thread, distinct in color and texture, contributes to the beauty of the whole. In celebrating this diversity, we acknowledge the divine wisdom in creating a world where no single perspective holds the monopoly on truth or virtue.

The Gambia's ability to maintain interfaith and intertribal peace is a testament to the power of shared values and communal identity. Research and history have shown that societies thrive when they emphasize collective solidarity over individualism or factionalism. The bonds we share rooted in family structures, mutual respect, and cultural exchange serve as a buffer against external forces that seek to fragment us. However, this delicate balance requires intentional cultivation, for even the strongest societies can falter when seeds of discord are sown.

Sometime ago, one of our politicians publicly declared "burying an entire tribe in this country 'nine feet deep'", which was so extreme that it earned a rebuke from the UN special adviser for prevention of genocide. Just in recent times too, one of our current Ministers warned his supporters against voting for the "rats" (referring to a tribe), saying it "would spell the suffering of a particular Gambian tribe." He also made comments about ID cards that were seen as ethnically divisive. These are some horrifying seeds being sown by some politicians in our midst who exploit our differences for personal or political gain. This divisive rhetoric thrives on fear and mistrust, encouraging Gambians to see their neighbors not as allies but as threats. From a philosophical perspective, this is a betrayal of the ethical principles that underpin a just society. From a sociological standpoint, it undermines the cohesion that is essential for social stability and progress.

The spirit of Christmas calls us to rise above such manipulation. The birth of Christ, celebrated across the world as a moment of divine reconciliation, reminds us of our shared destiny. It challenges us to embrace love, humility, and solidarity as antidotes to division. Philosophers like Martin Buber have spoken of the "I-Thou" relationship, where we recognize the other not as an object but as a fellow being of equal worth. This relational perspective is crucial for The Gambia as we navigate the

complexities of tribal and religious coexistence.

Sociologically, the strength of our unity lies in our ability to build bridges rather than walls. Social cohesion is not a given; it is built through trust, dialogue, and shared purpose. The sight of Gambians celebrating together across religious and tribal lines is evidence of a deep-seated resilience. However, resilience is not invincibility. It requires vigilance and renewal.

As we exchange gifts this Christmas, let us also exchange commitments to safeguard this unity. Let us pledge to reject the divisive narratives of those who would turn us against one another. Instead, let us embrace leaders and policies that promote inclusivity and equality. Our shared values of family, community, and respect are the foundation upon which we can build a stronger, more united Gambia.

Christmas reminds us that the light of hope shines brightest in times of darkness. It is a call to action, urging us to be stewards of unity, philosophers of love, and builders of a just society. If we honor this calling, we will not only celebrate the gift of unity in diversity but also ensure that it remains a defining feature of The Gambia for generations to come.

THE DIOCESE OF BANJUL NEWSLETTER APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

We have a small favor to ask. Many people are beginning to turn to the Diocese of Banjul Newsletter for vital, independent, and quality journalism. Therefore, readers around the world now need to support us financially.

We would like to invite you to join the myriad of readers who have taken the step to support us financially – keeping us open to all, and fiercely independent. In 2021, this support assisted in sustaining our work in diverse spheres. It enabled diligent, fact-checked, authoritative journalism to thrive in an era of falsehood, sensation, hype and breathtaking misinformation and misconception. In 2022, we will be no less active.

With no shareholders or billionaire owner, we can set our own agenda and provide trustworthy journalism that's free from commercial and political influence, offering a counterweight to the spread of misinformation. When it's never mattered more, we can investigate and challenge without fear or favour.

Unlike many others, Banjul Newsletter journalism is available for everyone to read, we do this because we believe in information equality. While others commoditize information, we seek to democratize it. Greater numbers of people can keep track of societal issues, understand their impact, and become inspired to take meaningful action.

If there were ever a time to join us, it is now. Every contribution, however big or small, powers our journalism and sustains our future. Support the Banjul Newsletter for as little as any amount. ***If you can, please consider supporting us with a regular amount each month. Thank you.***

COVER
STORY

The Christmas Hope

Abundant God's Love and Humanity's Redemption

Every year, as December draws near, the world comes alive with the unmistakable warmth and beauty of Christmas. Streets glow with dazzling lights, homes echo with laughter, and hearts swell with joy. It is a season marked by festivity, generosity, and togetherness. Yet, beyond the gifts and gatherings, Christmas holds a profound spiritual significance that speaks to every believer across the ages. It is not just a holiday—it is a divine event that celebrates the love of God, renews the hope of humanity, and calls believers to a life of purpose and redemption.

The origins of Christmas are as humble as the Savior it celebrates. Over two thousand years ago, in a little town called Bethlehem, a child was born to Mary and Joseph under extraordinary circumstances. This child, Jesus Christ, was no ordinary infant. The angel Gabriel had announced His conception as a divine act, proclaiming Him the Son of God, destined to save humanity. His birth fulfilled ancient prophecies, including Isaiah's declaration: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The setting of Christ's birth was strikingly simple: a manger in a stable. This humility was no accident but a powerful message. Jesus, the King of Kings, chose to enter the world not in grandeur but in modesty.

His arrival emphasized that salvation was for all—rich and poor, powerful and meek. From the very beginning, Christmas embodied inclusivity, equality, and divine grace, reminding believers that God's love knows no boundaries.

At its core, Christmas is a celebration of love. John 3:16 encapsulates the essence of this season: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This verse underscores the immense sacrifice God made in sending His Son to redeem humanity. Jesus' birth was the ultimate expression of divine love—a love so boundless that it sought to bridge the chasm between heaven and earth.

This love invites believers to reflect on their own capacity for compassion and selflessness. During the Christmas season, acts of charity and kindness abound, from feeding the hungry to visiting the lonely. These gestures, though often small, are profound echoes of the love that God showed in sending His Son. Christmas is a call to embody this love in our daily lives, to see Christ in the faces of others, and to let our actions be guided by empathy and understanding.

Equally significant is the message of hope that Christmas brings. At the time of Jesus' birth, the world was steeped in turmoil. The people of Israel were living under Roman occupation, yearning for liberation and a savior. In

this context, the arrival of Jesus was a beacon of hope—a sign that God had not forgotten His people. The angel's message to the shepherds, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10), resonates deeply even today.

For believers, the hope of Christmas is not confined to a historical event. It is a living hope that sustains them through life's challenges. It is the assurance that no matter how dark the night, the light of Christ will shine. It is the confidence that God's promises are true and that His plans for humanity are good. This hope transforms Christmas from a mere celebration into a source of spiritual renewal, inspiring believers to face the future with faith and courage.

Redemption is another central theme of Christmas. The birth of Jesus marked the beginning of God's plan to save humanity from sin. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus offered a path back to God—a way to be reconciled with the Creator and to live in righteousness. This gift of redemption is universal, extending to all who believe, regardless of their past or their status.

The story of the Nativity, with its shepherds and wise men, underscores this universality. Shepherds, often seen as lowly and unimportant, were among the first to witness the miracle of Christ's birth, highlighting God's concern for the marginalized. On the other hand, the wise men, learned and wealthy, traveled great distances to honor Him, showing that Jesus' message

transcends social and cultural barriers.

For believers, this redemption carries profound implications. It calls them to live lives of holiness, to seek reconciliation with God and others, and to share the good news of salvation with the world. Christmas is not just a time to celebrate Christ's birth but to embrace the transformation His coming offers. It is an invitation to reflect on one's relationship with God and to commit to a life that honors Him.

The implications of Christmas extend beyond individual faith. It is a call to community and collective responsibility. The celebration of Christmas brings people together—families, friends, and even strangers—reminding them of the importance of unity and mutual support. It challenges believers to address social injustices, to care for the less fortunate, and to build a world that reflects the values of the Gospel.

In today's world, where materialism often overshadows spirituality, the true meaning of Christmas can sometimes be lost. The commercialization of the season, with its emphasis on gifts, decorations, and parties, can distract from the profound spiritual truths it represents. Yet, these outward expressions of joy need not be at odds with the faith. They can serve as reminders of the joy and generosity that Christmas inspires.

For every believer, Christmas is a time to pause and



reflect. It is a moment to remember the extraordinary love of God, to renew one's hope in His promises, and to embrace the redemption He offers. It is a season to celebrate not just with festivities but with faith, to honor the birth of Christ not just with words but with deeds.

As the world celebrates this sacred season, may every believer find in it a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper connection to the divine. Let the light of Christmas shine in our hearts, illuminating the path of love, hope, and redemption for ourselves and others. And as we gather around the manger in spirit, may we be reminded that the child born in Bethlehem came not just to change history but to transform each of us.

Where Is Jesus?

We Do Not Know Where He Is, Yet He Was Born for Us

In the bustling season of Christmas, the name of Jesus is everywhere; on banners, in carols, and in sermons. Yet for many, the question still lingers: Where is Jesus? Amid the glittering lights, the crowded malls, and the feasts we prepare, His presence can often feel elusive. This paradox of celebrating His birth while questioning His whereabouts raises profound questions about our faith, our world, and the purpose of His coming.

Jesus was born for us, a monumental truth that changed the course of history. His birth in a humble manger in Bethlehem was the ultimate gift of love from God to humanity. But as we reflect on this truth today, it is worth exploring why so many feel distant from Him, and why, despite this perceived absence, His life and message remain deeply relevant to us.

The story of Jesus' birth begins with a search. Mary and Joseph, weary from their journey to Bethlehem, sought a place for the Christ-child to be born. The bustling town, crowded with travelers for the census, offered them no room. Finally, they found shelter in a stable, a place of simplicity and humility. From the very beginning, Jesus' arrival was marked by rejection and obscurity.

This setting, the Son of God born in an animal's shelter seems paradoxical. If Jesus was born for us, why would He come in such lowly circumstances? The answer lies in the profound symbolism of His birth. Jesus came not to elevate Himself but to meet humanity where it was amid the ordinary struggles and messiness of life.

Today, we often find ourselves searching for Jesus in the wrong places. We look for Him in grand displays of power, in moments of extraordinary clarity, or in the perfection of our own lives. But the nativity story reminds us that Jesus is found in humility and simplicity. He is present in the unnoticed corners of our lives, in the small acts of kindness and the quiet moments of prayer.

Yet, even with this understanding, the modern world presents unique challenges to recognizing His presence. In an age dominated by technology, materialism, and individualism, the distractions are endless. The commercialization of Christmas often obscures its spiritual significance, reducing the season to a celebration of consumerism rather than the commemoration of a Savior.

For many, this raises the painful question: If Jesus was born for us, why does He feel so far away? Why does suffering persist, and why does the world seem increasingly fractured? The absence of immediate answers can deepen our sense of spiritual disconnection. But

Christmas, in its essence, is a story of love that transcends time, a message of hope that endures, and a gift of redemption that is available to all. It is a celebration of the greatest truth of the Christian faith: that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to save it. Let this truth guide our lives, not just during this season but throughout the year, as we strive to live in the light of Christ and to share His love with the world.

May the joy of Christmas fill every heart, and may its message inspire us to build a world that reflects the beauty of the Savior we celebrate.

perhaps the answer lies in the very nature of Jesus' mission.

When Jesus was born, the world was not instantly transformed into a paradise. Instead, He brought a message of hope, love, and redemption; one that required humanity to participate in its fulfillment. Jesus came to show us the way, to teach us how to love God and one another, and to offer us eternal life. His birth was not the end of the story but the beginning of a divine partnership. This partnership calls us to action. Jesus is not distant; He is present wherever His teachings are lived out. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick, we encounter Him. When we forgive those who wrong us, stand up for justice, and extend compassion to the marginalized, we bring His presence into the world.

One of the most striking aspects of Jesus' life was His choice to dwell among the poor, the sinners, and the outcasts. He did not seek comfort or status but instead walked alongside those who were rejected by society. This choice was not incidental; it was central to His mission. Jesus came to reveal that God's love knows no boundaries and that His kingdom is open to all.

In this light, the question "Where is Jesus?" takes on a new dimension. He is with the refugee fleeing war and persecution. He is with the single mother struggling to provide for her children. He is with the lonely, the forgotten, and the oppressed. To find Jesus, we must look beyond our comfort zones and seek Him in the faces of those who are suffering.

But recognizing Jesus in others requires a shift in perspective. It challenges us to move beyond our prejudices, fears, and self-centeredness. It calls us to embrace the radical love that He embodied—a love that is selfless, inclusive, and transformative.

As believers, this journey of seeking Jesus also involves confronting our own doubts and weaknesses. The Bible recounts the story of the Magi, who traveled great distances, guided by a star, to find the newborn King. Their journey was fraught with uncertainty, yet they persisted, driven by faith. Similarly, our spiritual journeys may be marked by moments of doubt and struggle, but these moments can lead us closer to Him if we remain steadfast.

In the sacraments of the Church, we are reminded of Jesus' enduring presence. In the Eucharist, He gives Himself to us fully, nourishing our souls and strengthening our faith. In the sacrament of reconciliation, He offers us forgiveness and healing, inviting us to start anew. Through

these sacred encounters, we come to know that Jesus is not far from us but intimately close.

The implications of Jesus' birth extend beyond individual faith; they have profound societal significance. The message of Christmas; the message of peace, goodwill, and love, is a call to build a world that reflects these values. It challenges us to confront the injustices and divisions that mar our societies and to work toward a vision of unity and harmony.

This task is not easy. It requires courage, perseverance, and faith. But it is a task that Jesus entrusted to us, His followers. In the Beatitudes, He blessed the peacemakers, the merciful, and the pure in heart, affirming that they would inherit His kingdom. These blessings serve as both encouragement and instruction, guiding us in our mission to bring His light into the world.

As we celebrate Christmas, we are invited to reflect on what it means to live as people for whom Jesus was born. Are we living lives that honor His teachings? Are we seeking Him in the places and people where He is most present? Are we carrying His message of hope and love into a world that desperately needs it?

The question "Where is Jesus?" is not a question of distance but of awareness. Jesus is with us, but we must open our eyes and hearts to see Him. He is not confined to

a manger or a church building; He is present wherever His love is lived out.

In a world that often feels dark and divided, the birth of Jesus is a beacon of hope. It reminds us that God has not abandoned us but has entered into our story, sharing in our joys and sorrows. It assures us that love is stronger than hate, that light will overcome darkness, and that life triumphs over death.

Christmas is a celebration of this hope, a time to renew our faith and recommit ourselves to the mission of Christ. It is a reminder that, while we may not always feel His presence, He is always with us, guiding us, loving us, and calling us to be His hands and feet in the world.

So, where is Jesus? He is in the manger, yes, but also in the Eucharist. He is in the Church, but also in the streets. He is in the quiet of prayer and the noise of our daily lives. He is wherever love is shared, wherever mercy is shown, and wherever justice is pursued.

Jesus was born for us not to remain distant but to dwell among us, within us, and through us. As we celebrate His birth, may we seek Him with all our hearts and strive to make His presence known to others. For in finding Jesus, we discover the fullness of life, the depth of love, and the hope of eternity.

VIEWPOINTBy Andrew Sylva - andrewsylva1982@gmail.com*The author*

Religious Intolerance, Bigotry and Land Grabbing: Looming Catastrophe in The Gambia

The Gambia has been aptly described as the 'Smiling Coast' of West Africa. She is believed to be one of the friendliest and safest places to visit in the world. The country's economy is heavily reliant on its tourism sector because of its hospitable and welcoming citizens. As a country, Gambia is known for its friendliness and warm hospitality together with a captivating people living with the peace, security and relative political stability which has been the case since independence in 1965. This, indeed, is the major reason the country is known as the smiling coast of Africa. One very fascinating feature of this country is its people. Another accolade that The Gambia is known for is nickname as haven in Africa. Haven in the sense that it is one of the most peaceful and hospitable places to live in the world. It is also a place of safety or refuge.

However, the fine trappings and accolade that The GAMBIA is known for over the years is now drifting into sometime else. Currently, we witness religious intolerance, bigotry and land grabbing noticeable in other climes around our domain. To a large extent one can say that The Gambia of the past boasted of religious flexibility and tolerance for many years.

The constitution provides for the freedom of religious choice, as long as doing so does not impinge on the rights of others or the national interest. It prohibits religious discrimination, establishment of a state religion, and formation of political parties based on religious affiliation. Two years of drafting a new constitution and a parliamentary debate described by media as polarized and acrimonious came to an end when the legislature in September rejected the new constitution. Although not the main issue of contention, the omission of the word "secular" in the draft generated debate during the

ratification process. Some members of the Christian community had advocated the inclusion of the word "secular" in the description of the republic, stating that the omission of the specific reference to the secular nature of the state left open the possibility of minority persecution, although other provisions of the draft constitution guaranteed religious freedom and non-establishment of a state religion.

"We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." - James Baldwin

Religious intolerance usually originates from the perceived superiority of one religion over the others. In simple terms, religious intolerance or fanaticism is the inability of an adherent of a particular religion to acknowledge, accommodate and accept the right of others to live by another faith different from his own. Invariably, such attitude is connected to the conviction that one's religion is the only divinely ordained path to spiritual enlightenment and immortality in heaven. Consequently, a religious fanatic believes strongly that his religion is unquestionably superior to other religions. It is good to point out that being zealous for one's religion is commendable and is to be expected, but where such zeal is wrongly channelled, it becomes dangerous for the life of the community and it is an abuse of human rights.

Gambia, like many other countries, is a secular country going by her Constitution. It therefore bears restating that the Constitution guarantees freedom of worship and no one should be victimised for their beliefs. The multiple religions in the country give every citizen the right opportunity to choose which faith is convenient. Therefore, freedom of faith must be defended at all cost, even when those in

authority are not convenient with it. It is intolerable that the world's religions - founded on the values of love and compassion - should provide a pretext for the expression of hatred and violence.

Religious intolerance poses a great threat to human rights. Human rights apply to all irrespective of colour, gender, sex, religion, health status, dress, socio-economic status, etc. This threat is not simply because of the specific acts of fundamentalist groups which may be recognised as concrete violations of human rights standards; the real threat comes from the political aims or the political project that is at the heart of fundamentalisms, which is essentially to transform the way identities are ascribed and negotiated. The human rights question is about us having rights as human beings. The fundamentalist claim is very different: it is about ascribing humanity on the basis of a certain religious claim which has to be legitimated by certain authorities, and which in turn lays down a whole set of other obligations and subject relationships with self and others to a certain kind of regime.

Right to religious freedom is based on the inherent dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). In the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it is explicitly affirmed that the recognition of the dignity and the rights of the human person is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace, and that disregard and contempt for them are acts of barbarousness that offend the conscience of humankind. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, teach that the right of the individual and of communities to social and civil freedom in religious matters carries with it the right "to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits".

Today, most of the world's major conflicts are as a result of religious intolerance that has been left to fester into uncontrollable spiral of violence. We must restate that religious belief is fundamental to many human identities. It is part of the ways in which human beings experience the world around them. Hence all have the right to enjoy freedom to choose which religion that one is convenient with.

Another cause of the conflicts has been the state's use of religion and ethnicity in political discourse or action. Therefore, it is clear that accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression and domination are the major causes that fuel ethno-religious conflicts. Religious intolerance is expressed in discrimination, repression and religious rivalry, and results in or results from persecution. It leads to war and persistent hatred between nations and between peoples within nations. *I shall call you religious from the day you begin to see God in men and women" -Swami Vivekananda.*

Another noticeable vice that is creeping in in The Gambia is religious bigotry. Bigotry is the disliking of people because of their religious beliefs and culture. A bigot is a person who a person who has strong, unreasonable beliefs and who does not like other people who have different beliefs or a different way of life. It is an individual who strongly and unfairly demonstrates hate and intolerance to religious (including other) viewpoints.

Religion, ordinarily understood, provides some sense of the divine, awe, respect, justice, and peace in the society. The true meaning of religiosity is, therefore, felt in an atmosphere of decorum and equanimity. On the contrary,

religion can be misused through violence, bigotry, and fanaticism. Perhaps, a negative aspect of religion and its impact on good governance is the present situation in Nigeria, manifested mainly in the upsurge of fundamentalism and reckless radicalism or fanaticism, as exhibited by the Boko Haram sect since 2009 and other allied religious terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) etc. With the current development of religious bigotry noticeable in The Gambia, danger is looming in the country. It is therefore germane that the Gambian government takes proactive measures to contain this unsavory development.

If we do not put these to a check and stand up in defence of human rights, the space for the exercise of religious freedom will diminish significantly and progressively the bigots will become extreme in their attacks on believers of other faiths and values. By our actions and inactions, we should not allow Islamic State (IS) and Boko Haram to find its equivalence in our beautiful Gambia.

In recent time in The Gambia, land grabbing has become a phenomenal issue that may lead to robbing Peter to pay Paul. Scramble for private ownership of land has never been higher in the history of The Gambia. Because of this unprecedented growth in numbers of private estate in the bid for private ownership of land, prices have rocketed sky-high. This is not due to the simple economic principle that land value appreciates over time. More than just that, players in the land game have kept both demand and prices growing higher and higher, it emerged that there is a new breed of land grabbers in the corridors of power in the country.

The outcome of this is that it exposes poor people to hunger, violence and the threat of a lifetime in poverty. Furthermore, land grabs result in the displacement of local people, which is detrimental to their human rights. Almost all the lands in the Kombos and its adjoining towns are being grabbed for. This development issue affects traditional livelihoods, based mainly on cultivation, fishing, gathering and hunting, have been threatened by several impacts from the land grabs. These include loss of land, declined access to resources, damaged ecosystems, deforestation and lack of alternative ways to maintain food security. If this malaise is not articulately contained, many indigenes in The Gambia would become squatters in their ancestral and God-given land. Moreover, it poses threats to developing country's sovereignty and to local communities' survival.

Traditional land owners in different communities are being dispossessed of land inherited from generation of their ancestry. Communal reserved land for agricultural and collective use in many parties of Kombo is being transformed into privately commercial ownership for profits.

In recent time the media in The Gambia have reported land cases involving officials, Real Estate Agencies and traditional owners of lands within the Kombos and discovered huge scam, rip-offs and kickbacks during the allocation and selling of plots of lands in almost every new established settlement. It has been discovered in many instances that land owners were conditioned and made to believe by government officials, unscrupulous land agents and some families that their land falls within a reserve land for community use only to be sold to land dealers and highest buyers.

Some land agents and some members of the land owner's family are most at times the sole recipients of huge proceeds from the sale of these lands. These actions, have

made many rightful landowners lose their properties to the highest bidders who could bribe land officials to grab lands for them at every new settlement within Kombos. Some Alkalos and certain individuals' family members are also involved in selling the same plots of land to different buyers at a time knowing or unknowing. These kinds of instances created feud over ownership, some of it ended in frustrating and endless court cases. If these land grabbing continues to fester, many Gambians would be disposed of their ancestral lands.

Conclusion

The Gambia is a secular state and the law guarantees everyone the right to practice (or even not belong to) any religion. Therefore, no one has the right to castigate anyone else for his/her chosen religious faith and everyone expects the government to take quite an uncompromising stance on such provocative comments being peddled by these religious bigots and their followers. We have all seen what had been happening in other countries in the sub-region where such extremism had taken root, and therefore, unless

the government nips this unprovoked menace in the bud, this country risks being plunged into socio-religious conflict of unpredictable proportions. It is quite clear that our society is quite homogeneous, with virtually everyone related to everyone else, regardless of our ethno-social divisions. Therefore, if such religious extremism is allowed to take root in our homogeneous Gambian society, it could have quite far-reaching consequences for our very survival as a nation.

Therefore, neither the government nor we ordinary Gambians should allow such a small group of extremist bigots to plunge this country into chaos which can have catastrophic repercussions for this peaceful country of ours. People of different religions and sects had always co-existed in peace and tranquillity in this country and it would be quite a shame if we should allow these extremists to bring chaos to this country in the name of religion.

Mankind must live in a harmony with one another in order to have a peaceful world." - Lailah Gifty Akita

OUR RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION

Awakening the Catholic Faith

In an ever-changing world, the Catholic Church, with its 2,000-year history, continues to evolve in ways that resonate deeply with its faithful while staying true to its timeless teachings. As the largest Christian denomination, with over 1.3 billion adherents worldwide, the Church is both a spiritual anchor and a living institution that adapts to meet the needs of its people and respond to global challenges. Today, every Catholic should be aware of significant developments shaping the Church, its mission, and its community.

One of the most notable trends in the Catholic Church today is the increasing emphasis on synodality; a process of journeying together in unity, listening, and discerning as a collective body of Christ. Spearheaded by Pope Francis, the concept of synodality represents a shift from a hierarchical decision-making structure to one that encourages participation from the laity, clergy, and bishops alike. The Synod on Synodality, which began in 2021 and culminates in 2024, aims to deepen the Church's commitment to inclusivity and dialogue.

Pope Francis has emphasized that synodality is not merely a procedural adjustment but a spiritual journey rooted in communion, participation, and mission. By fostering a listening Church, synodality seeks to ensure that the voices of all Catholics, including women, youth, and marginalized communities, are heard. This approach challenges the faithful to embrace humility and open-mindedness, recognizing that the Holy Spirit works through all members of the Church.

For many, this process has been transformative, offering a platform to address pressing issues such as clerical abuse, gender roles, and the integration of LGBTQ+ Catholics. While some traditionalists view synodality with skepticism, fearing it might dilute the Church's teachings, others see it as a way to revitalize faith communities and reaffirm the Church's role as a home for all believers.

Another trending development within the Church is the

growing focus on environmental stewardship, inspired by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In this landmark document, the Pope called on Catholics and all people of goodwill to care for our common home, the Earth. He emphasized that environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable, urging the Church to lead by example in combating climate change and promoting sustainable living.

This call to action has spurred countless initiatives worldwide. Catholic dioceses, parishes, and schools have embraced eco-friendly practices, from reducing carbon footprints to planting trees and advocating for renewable energy. The Vatican itself has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050, showcasing the Church's dedication to environmental responsibility. The faithful are encouraged to integrate these principles into their daily lives, understanding that caring for creation is a moral and spiritual obligation.

Equally significant is the Church's expanding role in addressing social justice issues. Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, the Church continues to champion the dignity of every human person, the rights of workers, and the pursuit of peace. In recent years, this mission has taken on new dimensions, particularly in the context of global migration, economic inequality, and racial injustice.

Catholic organizations have been at the forefront of providing aid to refugees and migrants, advocating for humane immigration policies, and promoting solidarity among nations. The Church's voice has been especially impactful during crises, such as the displacement of millions due to wars, natural disasters, and political turmoil. Pope Francis has repeatedly highlighted the plight of migrants, reminding Catholics that welcoming the stranger is a fundamental Christian duty.

The Church's commitment to social justice also extends to economic reform. In a world where wealth disparities continue to widen, the Vatican has called for a rethinking of economic systems that prioritize profit over people.

Through documents like *Fratelli Tutti* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis has challenged the global community to embrace a culture of encounter and solidarity, rejecting consumerism and fostering equitable development.

Technology and digital evangelization represent another crucial frontier for the Catholic Church. In a digital age, the Church has recognized the importance of engaging with the faithful through modern means. Social media platforms, podcasts, and virtual events have become essential tools for spreading the Gospel and connecting with younger generations.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, with many parishes livestreaming Masses and offering online catechesis. While these innovations have been invaluable in maintaining spiritual connections, they also pose challenges. The Church must navigate the complexities of digital communication, ensuring that it complements rather than replaces in-person worship and community-building.

In addition to evangelization, technology is reshaping pastoral care and education. Virtual counseling sessions, online retreats, and e-learning platforms for seminarians are just a few examples of how the Church is leveraging technology to meet the needs of its people. These developments underscore the Church's adaptability and its commitment to being present wherever the faithful are, even in the digital realm.

Another area of development is the renewed emphasis on youth engagement. The Church has long recognized the vital role of young people in its future, but recent years have seen a more intentional effort to empower and involve them. Events like World Youth Day, which gathers millions of young Catholics from around the globe, exemplify this commitment.

Beyond events, the Church is fostering youth leadership and participation in decision-making processes. Initiatives such as the Synod on Young People in 2018 highlighted the Church's desire to listen to and learn from the younger generation. By addressing their concerns, including mental health, education, and employment, the Church seeks to inspire a new wave of discipleship and missionary zeal.

The role of women in the Church is another topic that has garnered significant attention. While the Church upholds its tradition regarding ordination, there is a

growing recognition of the need to expand opportunities for women's leadership within the Church. Pope Francis has appointed women to key positions in the Vatican, including laywomen serving as undersecretaries in the Synod of Bishops and in other significant roles.

These appointments reflect a broader cultural shift, acknowledging the invaluable contributions of women to the life of the Church. Laywomen, religious sisters, and theologians are increasingly taking on roles in governance, education, and evangelization, ensuring that their voices are heard in shaping the Church's future.

Finally, the Church is witnessing a revival in Eucharistic devotion. In a time when secularism and religious indifference are on the rise, the Church is doubling down on its central teaching that the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. Eucharistic congresses, adoration chapels, and catechesis on the Real Presence are helping to deepen the faith of believers and reignite their love for the sacraments.

This revival is particularly significant in the context of declining Mass attendance in some parts of the world. By emphasizing the transformative power of the Eucharist, the Church invites the faithful to rediscover the joy and mystery of encountering Christ in the breaking of the bread.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church is undergoing dynamic transformations that reflect its commitment to addressing contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in its foundational truths. From synodality and environmental stewardship to digital evangelization and social justice, these developments are shaping a Church that is more inclusive, responsive, and mission-oriented.

For every Catholic, understanding these trends is not just a matter of awareness but an invitation to actively participate in the life of the Church. It is a call to embrace the journey of faith with renewed vigor, to contribute to the Church's mission in meaningful ways, and to ensure that its message of love, hope, and redemption continues to shine brightly in the world.

As the Church moves forward, it does so with the assurance that the Holy Spirit is guiding it, as promised by Christ. And as the faithful journey together, they are reminded that the heart of the Church's mission remains the same: to bring the light of Christ to a world in need.

JUBILEE PRAYER FOR THE YEAR 2025

Father in heaven, may the *faith* you have given us in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother, and the flame of *charity* enkindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, reawaken in us the blessed *hope* for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel. May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos in the sure expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, *Pilgrims of Hope*, a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever. Amen.



The Pen is Sharper than the Sword in Transforming Society in All Dimensions

History is replete with evidence that the written word wields unparalleled power in shaping societies, ideologies, and destinies. The pen, as a symbol of intellect and dialogue, has often proven mightier than the sword, which represents brute force and conflict. Through its transformative capacity, the pen influences politics, education, culture, and human rights, leaving an indelible mark on the tapestry of human civilization. As Edward Bulwer-Lytton aptly said, “The pen is mightier than the sword,” underscoring its potential to create lasting change without bloodshed. **“A sword may pierce the body, but pen wields a power that carves into the soul, leaving scars unseen but deeply felt.”**

Throughout history, the written word has been a driving force in political revolutions and reforms. Manifestos, constitutions, and political treatises have sparked movements that changed the course of nations. For instance, the American Declaration of Independence, authored by Thomas Jefferson, became a monumental document advocating for freedom and equality. Similarly, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto* provided the foundation for revolutionary ideologies that reshaped global politics.

In contemporary society, journalism exemplifies the pen’s power in holding governments accountable. Investigative reports exposing corruption and human rights abuses have brought down oppressive regimes. The late Nigerian journalist Dele Giwa once remarked, “A journalist’s pen is an agent of truth and justice,” capturing the essence of the written word’s role in fostering transparency and democracy.

The pen has been instrumental in the dissemination of knowledge and the advancement of education. Books, journals, and articles are the primary vessels through which knowledge travels across generations and geographies. Renowned philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, and Confucius used their writings to shape educational paradigms that are still relevant today.

Modern educational systems heavily rely on written curricula to impart knowledge. Without the power of the pen, the exchange of ideas between scholars, students, and educators would be nearly impossible. As Nelson Mandela stated, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” The pen, as the vehicle of education, enables societies to progress and innovate, laying the groundwork for sustainable development.

Cultural identity and history owe much to the pen. Written records—ranging from ancient scripts to modern literature—document traditions, beliefs, and narratives that define communities. In Africa, oral traditions were eventually documented by writers such as Chinua Achebe, whose novel *Things Fall Apart* preserves the Igbo culture while critiquing the impact of colonialism.

Additionally, the pen fosters innovation by challenging outdated norms and sparking debates. Writers and artists push the boundaries of societal thought, inspiring cultural revolutions. The feminist movement, for instance, owes much to the writings of figures like Mary Wollstonecraft, whose book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* called for gender equality and inspired generations of activists.

The pen has been a powerful ally in the fight for human rights and social justice. The works of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela serve as enduring testaments to the pen’s ability to advocate for nonviolence and equality. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is a profound example of how the written word can inspire change, challenging the status quo while calling for justice.

In modern times, social media has amplified the power of the pen. Activists use platforms like Twitter, TikTok and blogs to highlight injustices, mobilize support, and drive societal change. For example, the #MeToo movement gained global momentum through the written testimonies of survivors, demonstrating that words remain a potent tool for advocacy in the digital age. Also, in The Gambia, #GambiaHasDecided in 2016 during the Political Impasse played a significant role in getting President Jammeh to accept the democratic will of the Gambian people.

While the sword may secure temporary victories, it often leaves behind destruction, animosity, and cycles of revenge. Wars may win territories, but they rarely win hearts or minds. The sword’s legacy is one of division, whereas the pen unites by appealing to reason, emotions, empathy, and shared humanity.

Mahatma Gandhi eloquently argued, “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.” His philosophy of nonviolence and civil disobedience, articulated through speeches and writings, demonstrated that meaningful societal transformation can be achieved without resorting to violence.

The pen’s power lies in its ability to address every dimension of society—political, social, cultural, and intellectual. It creates ideas that inspire action, documents history to guide future generations, and fosters dialogue that bridges divides. Unlike the sword, the pen nurtures growth rather than destruction.

As society grapples with modern challenges such as climate change, inequality, and political instability, the pen remains a beacon of hope. Writers, journalists, educators, and activists must harness this tool to promote understanding, innovation, and progress. The Nigerian author Wole Soyinka encapsulates this sentiment: “Books and all forms of writing are terror to those who wish to suppress the truth.”

The pen is indeed sharper than the sword in transforming society. Through its ability to educate, inspire, and unite, the pen has proven to be a powerful catalyst for positive change across all dimensions of human existence. While the sword may conquer lands, the pen conquers hearts and minds, creating a legacy that transcends time and borders. In the words of Malala Yousafzai, “One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.” Let us embrace the power of the pen to build a world defined by justice, equity, peace, and progress.

“Pen is a silent warrior, sharper than steel, cutting through the armor of strength and exposing the raw vulnerability of the human spirit.”

Please kindly contact the author for comments and views.

THE POPE'S PRAYER INTENTIONS 2024

December 2024 - For pilgrims of hope

We pray that this Jubilee Year strengthen our faith, helping us to recognize the Risen Christ in our daily lives, and that it may transform us into pilgrims of Christian hope.

JANUARY 2025 - For The Right To An Education

Let us pray for migrants, refugees and those affected by war, that their right to an education, which is necessary to build a better world, might always be respected.

Daily Mass Readings

December & January



1 December 2024

First Sunday of Advent

First Reading: [Jeremiah 33](#): 14-16

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 25](#): 4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

Second Reading: [First Thessalonians 3](#): 12 – 4: 2

Alleluia: [Psalm 85](#): 8

Gospel: [Luke 21](#): 25-28, 34-36

2 December 2024

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 2](#): 1-5

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 122](#): 1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9

Alleluia: [Psalms 80](#): 4

Gospel: [Matthew 8](#): 5-11

3 December 2024

Francis Xavier, Priest, Missionary Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 11](#): 1-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Gospel: [Luke 10](#): 21-24

4 December 2024

Advent Weekday/ John of Damascus, Priest, Religious, Doctor

First Reading: [Isaiah 25](#): 6-10a

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 23](#): 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Gospel: [Matthew 15](#): 29-37

5 December 2024

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 26](#): 1-6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 118](#): 1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a

Alleluia: [Isaiah 55](#): 6

Gospel: [Matthew 7](#): 21, 24-27

6 December 2024

Advent Weekday/ Nicholas, Bishop

First Reading: [Isaiah 29](#): 17-24

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 27](#): 1, 4, 13-14

Gospel: [Matthew 9](#): 27-31

7 December 2024

Ambrose, Bishop, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 30](#): 19-21, 23-26

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 147](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Alleluia: [Isaiah 33](#): 22

Gospel: [Matthew 9](#): 35 – 10: 1, 5a, 6-8

8 December 2024

Second Sunday of Advent

First Reading: [Baruch 5](#): 1-9

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 126](#): 1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Second Reading: [Philippians 1](#): 4-6, 8-11

Alleluia: [Luke 3](#): 4, 6

Gospel: [Luke 3](#): 1-6

9 December 2024

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Solemnity

First Reading: [Genesis 3](#): 9-15, 20

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4

Second Reading: [Ephesians 1](#): 3-6, 11-12

Alleluia: [Luke 1](#): 28

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38

10 December 2024

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Isaiah 40](#): 1-11

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 3 and 10ac, 11-12, 13

Gospel: [Matthew 18](#): 12-14

11 December 2024

Advent Weekday/ Damasus I, Pope

First Reading: [Isaiah 40](#): 25-31

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 103](#): 1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10

Gospel: [Matthew 11](#): 28-30

12 December 2024

Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast

First Reading: [Zechariah 2](#): 14-17 or [Revelation 11](#): 19a, 12: 1-6a, 10ab

Responsorial Psalm: [Judith 13](#): 18bcde, 19

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38 or [Luke 1](#): 39-47

13 December 2024

Lucy, Virgin, Martyr Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Isaiah 48](#): 17-19

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 1](#): 1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Gospel: [Matthew 11](#): 16-19

14 December 2024

John of the Cross, Priest, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Sirach 48](#): 1-4, 9-11

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 80](#): 2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19

Alleluia: [Luke 3](#): 4, 6

Gospel: [Matthew 17](#): 9a, 10-13

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15 December 2024

Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: [Zephaniah 3](#): 14-18a

Responsorial Psalm: [Isaiah 12](#): 2-3, 4, 5-6

Second Reading: [Philippians 4](#): 4-7

Alleluia: [Isaiah 61](#): 1

Gospel: [Luke 3](#): 10-18

16 December 2024

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Numbers 24](#): 2-7, 15-17

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 25](#): 4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8-9

Alleluia: [Psalms 85](#): 8

Gospel: [Matthew 21](#): 23-27

17 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Sapientia)

First Reading: [Genesis 49](#): 2, 8-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17

Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 1-17

18 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Adonai)

First Reading: [Jeremiah 23](#): 5-8

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 12-13, 18-19

Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 18-25

19 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Radix Jesse)

First Reading: [Judges 13](#): 2-7, 24-25a

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 71](#): 3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 5-25

20 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Clavis David)

First Reading: [Isaiah 7](#): 10-14

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 24](#): 1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 26-38

21 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Oriens)/ Peter Canisius, Priest, Doctor

First Reading: [Songs 2](#): 8-14 or [Zephaniah 3](#): 14-18a

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 33](#): 2-3, 11-12, 20-21

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 39-45

22 December 2024

Fourth Sunday of Advent (O Rex Gentium)

First Reading: [Micah 5](#): 1-4a

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 80](#): 2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Second Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 5-10

Alleluia: [Luke 1](#): 38

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 39-45

23 December 2024

Advent Weekday (O Emmanuel)/ John of Kanty, Priest

First Reading: [Malachi 3](#): 1-4, 23-24

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 25](#): 4-5ab, 8-9, 10 and 14

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 57-66

24 December 2024

Advent Weekday

First Reading: [Second Samuel 7](#): 1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 89](#): 2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 67-79

25 December 2024 – Vigil

The Nativity of the Lord Solemnity, Holy Day of Obligation/ Vigil

First Reading: [Isaiah 62](#): 1-5

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 89](#): 4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

Second Reading: [Acts 13](#): 16-17, 22-25

Gospel: [Matthew 1](#): 1-25

25 December 2024 – Midnight

The Nativity of the Lord Solemnity, Holy Day of Obligation/ Midnight

First Reading: [Isaiah 9](#): 1-6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13

Second Reading: [Titus 2](#): 11-14

Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 10-11

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 1-14

25 December 2024 – Dawn

The Nativity of the Lord Solemnity, Holy Day of Obligation/ Dawn

First Reading: [Isaiah 62](#): 11-12

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 97](#): 1, 6, 11-12

Second Reading: [Titus 3](#): 4-7

Alleluia: [Luke 2](#): 14

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 15-20

25 December 2024 – Day

The Nativity of the Lord Solemnity, Holy Day of Obligation/ Day

First Reading: [Isaiah 52](#): 7-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6

Second Reading: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-6

Gospel: [John 1](#): 1-18

26 December 2024

Stephen, Protomartyr Feast

First Reading: [Acts 6](#): 8-10; 7: 54-59

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 31](#): 3cd-4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17

Alleluia: [Psalms 118](#): 26a, 27a

Gospel: [Matthew 10](#): 17-22

27 December 2024

John, Apostle, Evangelist Feast

First Reading: [First John 1](#): 1-4

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalms 97](#): 1-2, 5-6, 11-12

Gospel: [John 20](#): 1a and 2-8

28 December 2024

Holy Innocents, Martyrs Feast

First Reading: [First John 1](#): 5 – 2: 2

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 124](#): 2-3, 4-5, 7b-8

Gospel: [Matthew 2](#): 13-18

29 December 2024

Holy Family Feast

First Reading: [First Samuel 1](#): 20-22, 24-28 or [Sirach 3](#): 2-6, 12-14

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 84](#): 2-3, 5-6, 9-10
or [Psalms 128](#): 1-2, 3, 4-5

Second Reading: [First John 3](#): 1-2, 21-24 or [Colossians 3](#): 12-21

Alleluia: [Colossians 3](#): 15a, 16a or [Acts 16](#): 14b

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 41-52

30 December 2024

Christmas Weekday

First Reading: [First John 2](#): 12-17

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 7-8a, 8b-9, 10

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 36-40

31 December 2024

Christmas Weekday/ Sylvester I, Pope

First Reading: [First John 2](#): 18-21

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2, 11-12, 13

Alleluia: [John 1](#): 14a, 12a

Gospel: [John 1](#): 1-18

1 January 2025 – Wednesday

Mary, Mother of God Solemnity (Octave of Christmas),

Holy Day of Obligation

First Reading: [Numbers 6](#): 22-27

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 67](#): 2-3, 5, 6, 8

Second Reading: [Galatians 4](#): 4-7

Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2

Gospel: [Luke 2](#): 16-21

2 January 2025 – Thursday

Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops,

Doctors Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First John 2](#): 22-28

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4

Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2

Gospel: [John 1](#): 19-28

3 January 2025 – Friday

Christmas Weekday/ Holy Name of Jesus

First Reading: [First John 2](#): 29 – 3: 6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 3cd-4, 5-6

Alleluia: [John 1](#): 14a, 12a

Gospel: [John 1](#): 29-34

4 January 2025 – Saturday

Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [First John 3](#): 7-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 7-8, 9

Alleluia: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-2

Gospel: [John 1](#): 35-42

5 January 2025 – Sunday

Epiphany of the Lord Solemnity

First Reading: [Isaiah 60](#): 1-6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Second Reading: [Ephesians 3](#): 2-3a, 5-6

Alleluia: [Matthew 2](#): 2

Gospel: [Matthew 2](#): 1-12

6 January 2025 – Monday

Christmas Weekday/ André Bessette, Religious

First Reading: [First John 3](#): 22 – 4: 6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 2](#): 7bc-8, 10-11

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23

Gospel: [Matthew 4](#): 12-17, 23-25

7 January 2025 – Tuesday

Christmas Weekday/ Raymond of Peñafort, Priest

First Reading: [First John 4](#): 7-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 3-4, 7-8

Alleluia: [Luke 4](#): 18

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 34-44

8 January 2025 – Wednesday

Christmas Weekday

First Reading: [First John 4](#): 11-18

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 10, 12-13

Alleluia: [First Timothy 3](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 6](#): 45-52

9 January 2025 – Thursday

Christmas Weekday

First Reading: [First John 4](#): 19 – 5: 4

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 72](#): 1-2, 14 and 15bc, 17

Alleluia: [Luke 4](#): 18

Gospel: [Luke 4](#): 14-22

10 January 2025 – Friday

Christmas Weekday

First Reading: [First John 5](#): 5-13

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 147](#): 12-13, 14-15, 19-20

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23

Gospel: [Luke 5](#): 12-16

11 January 2025 – Saturday

Christmas Weekday

First Reading: [First John 5](#): 14-21

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 149](#): 1-2, 3-4, 5 and 6a and 9b

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 16

Gospel: [John 3](#): 22-30

12 January 2025 – Sunday

Baptism of the Lord Feast

First Reading: [Isaiah 42](#): 1-4, 6-7 or [Isaiah 40](#): 1-5, 9-11

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 104](#): 1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

Second Reading: [Titus 2](#): 11-14; 3: 4-7

Alleluia: [Luke 3](#): 16

Gospel: [Luke 3](#): 15-16, 21-22

13 January 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Hilary, Bishop, Doctor

First Reading: [Hebrews 1](#): 1-6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 97](#): 1 and 2b, 6 and 7c, 9

Alleluia: [Mark 1](#): 15

Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 14-20

14 January 2025 – Tuesday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 5-12

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 8](#): 2ab and 5, 6-7, 8-9

Alleluia: [First Thessalonians 2](#): 13

Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 21-28

15 January 2025 – Wednesday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 2](#): 14-18

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 105](#): 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9

Alleluia: [John 10](#): 27

Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 29-39

16 January 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 3](#): 7-14

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 95](#): 6-7c, 8-9, 10-11

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23

Gospel: [Mark 1](#): 40-45

17 January 2025 – Friday

Anthony, Abbot Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 4](#): 1-5, 11

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 78](#): 3 and 4bc, 6c-7, 8

Alleluia: [Luke 7](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 1-12

18 January 2025 – Saturday

Ordinary Weekday/ Optional Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary

First Reading: [Hebrews 4](#): 12-16

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Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 19](#): 8, 9, 10, 15

Alleluia: [Luke 4](#): 18

Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 13-17

19 January 2025 – Sunday

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Isaiah 62](#): 1-5

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 96](#): 1-2a, 2b-3, 7-8, 9-10

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 12](#): 4-11

Alleluia: [Second Thessalonians 2](#): 14

Gospel: [John 2](#): 1-11

20 January 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Fabian, Pope, Martyr/ Sebastian, Martyr

First Reading: [Hebrews 5](#): 1-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 110](#): 1, 2, 3, 4

Alleluia: [Hebrews 4](#): 12

Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 18-22

21 January 2025 – Tuesday

Agnes, Virgin, Martyr Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 6](#): 10-20

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 111](#): 1-2, 4-5, 9 and 10c

Alleluia: [Ephesians 1](#): 17-18

Gospel: [Mark 2](#): 23-28

22 January 2025 – Wednesday

Day of Prayer For the Legal Protection of Unborn Children Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 7](#): 1-3, 15-17

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 110](#): 1, 2, 3, 4

Alleluia: [Matthew 4](#): 23

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 1-6

23 January 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday/ Vincent of Saragossa, Deacon, Martyr/ Marianne Cope, Virgin

First Reading: [Hebrews 7](#): 25 – 8: 6

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 40](#): 7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 17

Alleluia: [Second Timothy 1](#): 10

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 7-12

24 January 2025 – Friday

Francis De Sales, Bishop, Religious Founder, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 8](#): 6-13

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 85](#): 8 and 10, 11-12, 13-14

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 13-19

25 January 2025 – Saturday

Conversion of Paul, Apostle Feast

First Reading: [Acts 22](#): 3-16 or [Acts 9](#): 1-22

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 117](#): 1bc, 2

Alleluia: [John 15](#): 16

Gospel: [Mark 16](#): 15-18

26 January 2025 – Sunday

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: [Nehemiah 8](#): 2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 19](#): 8, 9, 10, 15

Second Reading: [First Corinthians 12](#): 12-30 or [First Corinthians 12](#): 12-14, 27

Alleluia: [Luke 4](#): 18

Gospel: [Luke 1](#): 1-4; 4: 14-21

27 January 2025 – Monday

Ordinary Weekday/ Angela Merici, Virgin, Religious Founder

First Reading: [Hebrews 9](#): 15, 24-28

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 98](#): 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4, 5-6

Alleluia: [Second Timothy 1](#): 10

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 22-30

28 January 2025 – Tuesday

Thomas Aquinas, Priest, Religious, Doctor Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 1-10

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 40](#): 2 and 4ab, 7-8a, 10, 11

Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25

Gospel: [Mark 3](#): 31-35

29 January 2025 – Wednesday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 11-18

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 110](#): 1, 2, 3, 4

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 1-20

30 January 2025 – Thursday

Ordinary Weekday

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 19-25

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 24](#): 1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

Alleluia: [Psalms 119](#): 105

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 21-25

31 January 2025 – Friday

John Bosco, Priest, Religious Founder Obligatory Memorial

First Reading: [Hebrews 10](#): 32-39

Responsorial Psalm: [Psalm 37](#): 3-4, 5-6, 23-24, 39-40

Alleluia: [Matthew 11](#): 25

Gospel: [Mark 4](#): 26-34

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December & January

Gambian Christian



During December 1823: Arrival of Hannah Kilham and English Quaker missionaries, who opened an agricultural centre at Bakau and a girls' school in Banjul.

18th January, 1848: Arrival of Fr. Ronarc'h from France, and Fr. Warlop from Belgium, to begin the Catholic mission.

26th December, 1873: Blessing by Bishop Durët of Dakar of the school in Hagan Street (*now Daniel Goddard Street*).

9th January, 1881: Death, from pneumonia, of Fr. Samba, first Gambian priest. He had been ordained in 1869.

3rd December, 1887: Fr. Massart died while saying the Last Gospel at the conclusion of Mass.

12th January, 1920: The SS *Afrique*, en route to Dakar from Bordeaux, sank at sea. Among the 563 who perished were Bishop Jalabert of Dakar and 18 missionaries.

19th December, 1931: Last entry in French in the Mission Journal, the Mission having been declared self-governing.

10th January, 1932: Fr. John Meehan was named first Ecclesiastical Superior of the self-governing Mission.

21st December, 1933: Fr. Doody, who had been taken ill while travelling from Ireland to Banjul, died while returning on the same boat that had brought him.

15th January, 1936: Fr. Harold Whiteside inaugurated Bwiam mission.

1st December, 1948: St. Therese's Elementary School, Kanifing opened with 114 pupils.

16th December, 1952: Departure of Fr. Coughlin after four years in The Gambia.

3rd December, 1953: Arrival from Nigeria of Fr. Michael Frawley to be Principal of St. Augustine's High School, Banjul, where he remained for 7 years.

24th December, 1954: Arrival of Fr. Michael Flynn.

1st January, 1956: Opening of the convent at Kanifing, with Mother Angela, Sr. Magdalene and Sr. Anne-Marie in residence, all teaching at St. Therese's School.

24th December, 1957: Fr. Michael Moloney was appointed first Bishop of Banjul; the announcement was not made locally until 12 days later.

8th January, 1964: Bishop Moloney blessed St Martin's Church, Kartong.

10th January, 1962: Arrival of Fr. Vincent Comer CSSp.

13th January, 1965: Bishop Moloney returned at the end of Vatican II.

25th December, 1968: The Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Mariani, blessed and opened Holy Spirit Church, Banjul.

14th January, 1972: Presentation of Mary Sisters 'Shalom Retreat Centre' was established.

21st January, 1977: Fr. Edward Grimes became first Director of the newly-formed Gambia Pastoral Institute (GPI).

16th December, 1977: Opening of the Diocesan Development Office (*now CaDO*).

3rd January, 1978: Opening of Christ the King, Darsilami.

30th December, 1985: The first pastoral assembly for clergy and religious opened at Shalom, Fajara.

5th December, 1987: First pilgrimage to Kunkujang Mariama.

21st January, 1989: Ordination at Kanifing of Fr. Anthony Sonko.

28th December, 1989: The second pastoral assembly opened at St. Peter's Technical High School, Lamin and included participation of the laity.

1st January, 1995: Death in Ireland of Fr. Michael Flynn.

9th January, 1998: Death in Banjul of Mrs. E. Senghore, aged 113.

31st December, 1999: The death of Bishop Michael Maloney C.S.Sp.

29th December, 2005: Abbé Blaise Malou and a group from Balandine, Casamance, began a 4-day visit to Fatima Parish, Bwiam.

During January 2007: 'Working with the poor' was the focus of a 10-day meeting at Shalom of 43 Presentation Sisters from 10 countries.

19th January, 2008: Alhaji Cherno Alieu Mass Kah, Imam Ratib of Banjul, visited the Cathedral of the Assumption.

17th January, 2010: Blessed Sacrament, Kanifing Estate, became an independent parish.

12th December, 2010: Sr. Josephine of Senegal and Sr. Mary of Ghana, took their final vows as Marist Sisters.

29th December, 2012: Sr. Calixte Thomas left for India, her home country, after many years in educational work in The Gambia.

3rd January, 2014: Bishop Robert Ellison received the keys of Centenary House, the new commercial building at Kairaba Avenue.

24th January, 2015: Ordination of Fr. James Mendy and Fr. Tanislas Ndecky.

14th January, 2021: Death of Thomas Gregory George Senghore 'TGG', a renowned Gambian Catholic.

20th January, 2021: First Christian radio, Radio Veritas, inaugurated in The Gambia at GPI.

23rd - 30th January, 2022: The ITCABIC Bishop's Conference took place in GPI. The conference was comprised of 5 Bishops, 4 from Sierra Leone and our own Bishop, 2 secretaries, 2 rectors, 4 and the Nuncio.

26th December, 2022: First Kids Boxing Day Fun / Spelling Bee Competition organized by Radio Veritas.

15th January, 2024: The death of Fr. Matthew Mendy is announced, which took place in Senegal, after a brief illness.

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Weekday Celebrations

December & January



SAINTS



3rd December

St Francis Xavier priest

Francis was born in Spain on 7th April, 1506. In Paris, he met Ignatius Loyola and became one of the first Jesuits. He was ordained in 1537, and in 1542, embarked on a three-year mission to India, and also established missions in Malaysia. In 1549, he went to Japan, and in 1551 returned to India. He died on 3 December, 1552, suffering from fever on the island of Sancian (Shangchuan, off the Chinese coast) as he attempted to secure entrance to the country, then closed to foreigners. Francis is believed to have baptised about 30,000 converts.

His success was partly due to his adaptation of Christianity to local cultures. In 1927, he was named patron of all missions.

7th December

St Ambrose doctor of the Church

Ambrose is one of the four great Latin Doctors of the Church (the others being Augustine, Jerome and Gregory). He was born in Trier (in modern-day Italy) in 339 and became a celebrated lawyer. When the bishopric of Milan fell vacant around 374, he was acclaimed bishop – though still a catechumen, and not yet baptised.

Ambrose's statesmanship and theological skills enabled him to convert many pagans. He combated Arianism (the heresy which denies the Holy Trinity). He imposed a public penance on the Emperor Theodosius I for condoning a massacre. He converted and baptised St. Augustine. Ambrose died in 397. His bishop's throne may still be seen in Milan.

8th December

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed as infallible by Pope Pius IX in 1854. It teaches that Mary, Mother of Christ, was conceived without sin: she was 'full of grace'. She received God's grace from the first moment of her existence, and spent her earthly life in a perfect relationship with Him. He filled her with grace so that she would be worthy to become Mother of God. Mary is perceived as the perfect example of the redeeming action of God's grace; she was only able to receive this grace because Christ would later redeem all humanity through His death on the cross.

26th December

St Stephen first Christian martyr

Like his Master, Jesus, Stephen was unjustly condemned by the religious authorities. And like Jesus, before his agonising death, Stephen prayed that his persecutors might be forgiven.

He was granted a vision of the risen Christ. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Coming immediately after Christmas Day, St. Stephen's Day reminds us that the Babe of Bethlehem was born to suffer and to die. (See *Acts, chapters 6 and 7*).

2nd January

St Basil & St. Gregory Nazianzen, doctors of the Church

Basil and Gregory were close friends and great figures of the Eastern Church in the 4th century. Basil had a brilliant academic career, but longed for a life of solitude. After extensive travels, he gave away most of his possessions and devoted himself to founding religious communities, writing an austere 'rule' which is still observed today.

Gregory was Bishop of Constantinople (now Istanbul). Because of his great learning, he was known as 'Gregory the Theologian'. Gregory eventually retired and returned to his monastery.

He summed up his life and Basil's thus: 'Our great concern, our great name, was to be Christians, and to be called Christians.'

28th January

St. Thomas Aquinas, doctor of the Church

Born in Aquino, Sicily, in 1225, **Thomas** studied in Naples and taught in Paris. He integrated the teaching of the Greek philosopher Aristotle into Christian thought, asserting that the theologian starts with faith and proceeds through reason. He died in 1274. In 1567, he was named a Doctor of the Church, and in 1879 was proclaimed by Pope Leo XIII as a champion of orthodoxy.

Thomas wrote more than 80 works. He is pre-eminent as a writer of liturgical texts, which combine clarity with beauty. Gambian Catholics are familiar with Thomas' Benediction hymns, O salutaris Hostia ('O saving Victim') and Tantum ergo sacramentum (Therefore, we before him bending').

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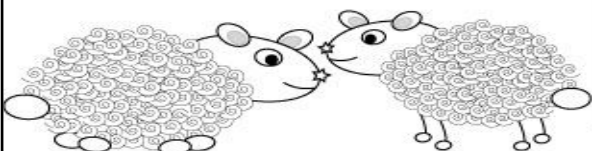
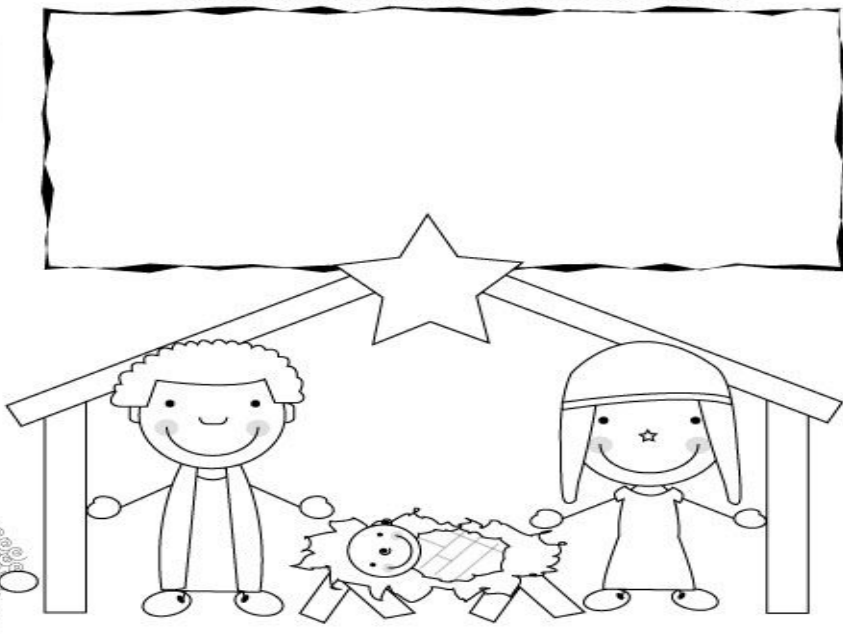
CHRISTMAS

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Can you draw some sheep or camels for the nativity?



December & January

Saviour of the world, by Your Cross and
Resurrection You have set us free.

Our Sunday Readings

1st December, 2024 -First Sunday of Advent, Year C

1st Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14
2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Alleluia: Psalm 85:8
Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Homily Theme: Beware That Your Hearts Do Not Become Drowsy From Carousing and Drunkenness.

Verse of the Day Reflection: This is the last day of our liturgical year! And on this day, the Gospel reminds us of how easy it is to become lazy in our life of faith. It reminds us that our hearts can become drowsy from “carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life.” Let’s look at these temptations. First, we are warned against carousing and drunkenness. This certainly applies on a literal level, meaning, we should obviously avoid abusing drugs and alcohol. But it also applies to numerous other ways that we are made “drowsy” through a lack of temperance. Abuse of alcohol is only one way of escaping from the burdens of life, but there are many ways we can do this. Any time we give in to an excess of one sort or another, we begin to let our hearts become drowsy on a spiritual level. Whenever we seek momentary escapes from life without turning to God, we allow ourselves to become spiritually drowsy.

Second, this passage identifies “the anxieties of daily life” as a source of becoming drowsy. So often we face anxiety in life. We can feel overwhelmed and overly burdened by one thing or another. When we feel burdened by life, we tend to look for a way out. And far too often, the “way out” is something that makes us spiritually drowsy. Jesus speaks this Gospel as a way of challenging us to remain awake and vigilant in our life of faith. This happens when we keep the truth in our minds and hearts and our eyes on the will of God. The moment we turn our eyes to the burdens of life and fail to see God in the midst of all things, we become spiritually drowsy and begin, in a sense, to fall asleep. As the liturgical year comes to a close, today, reflect upon the fact that God is calling you to become wide awake. He wants your full attention and He wants you completely sober in your life of faith. Put your eyes on Him and let Him keep you continually prepared for His imminent return.

Prayer: Lord, I do love You and I desire to love You all the more. Help me to remain wide awake in my life of faith. Help me to keep my eyes on You through all things so that I am always prepared for You when You come to me. Jesus, I love You. **Amen.**

8th December, 2024Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

1st Reading: Baruch 5:1-9
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6
2nd Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Alleluia: Luke 3:4, 6
Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Homily Theme: Repent For The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand!

Verse of the Day Reflection: On this, the Second Sunday of Advent, we are given the person of St. John the Baptist to ponder. What a gift he is! Jesus Himself stated that “among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11). What a compliment! What is it that made John so great? We can point to two things in particular. The first has to do with his calling and the second has to do with his virtue. First of all, John was great because he was the transition from the Old Testament Prophets to the New Testament. He was the bridge that prepared for the new life to come. His unique mission makes him truly great. But John was great not only because of his unique calling, but he was also great because of the virtue he had in his life. And it is this gift that is worth pondering for our own inspiration more than any other.

The particular virtue that John had was that of humility. He saw himself as nothing other than a “voice of one crying out in the desert.” And the Word he spoke was Jesus. John acknowledged that he was not even worthy to stoop down and untie the sandal straps of Jesus (Mark 1:7). He was praised by many and followed by many and yet he continuously said of Jesus that “He must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30). John was not in it for praise and honour; rather, his mission was to point everyone to the Savior of the world. He could have sought the honor and praise of many and he would have certainly received it. They may have even made him king. But John was more than willing to fulfill his mission and then submit himself to the cruel sword of his executioner. His humility was such that he was focused only on Jesus and desired only to point to Him. Reflect, today, upon this humility in your own life. Do you tend to point to yourself or to Christ? Do you seek the praise of others or do you humbly point all praise and glory to God? Humility is the path that St. John the Baptist took and it’s the path we must strive for each and every day.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the gift of St. John the Baptist. May his witness of humility inspire me in my Christian walk. Help me, Lord, to always point others to You rather than to myself. Jesus, I love You. **Amen.**

15th December, 2024
Third Sunday of Advent, Year C

1st Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18A
Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
2nd Reading: Philippians 4:4-7
Alleluia: Isaiah 61:1 (Cited In Luke 4:18)
Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

Homily Theme: St. John the Baptist.

Verse of the Day Reflection: Again, this Sunday, we are given the glorious witness of **St. John the Baptist**. This passage above is from Year C of the liturgical cycle, but Years A & B also present us with John the Baptist. In this sermon of John, he says that Jesus will come and baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The image of being baptized “with fire” is a good one to reflect upon. It especially reveals to us the deep purification Jesus desires for our souls. What does it mean to be purified? For one thing, the purification of our soul hurts. But it hurts in a sweet sort of way. Turning from sin and growing closer to God requires great sacrifice and surrender. And it requires that we allow God to do powerful things within us. And the most powerful thing God wants to do is purify us.

Our Catholic faith reveals to us the reality of Purgatory after we die. Purgatory is said to be a place of much spiritual pain, but again, in a sweet sort of way. It’s painful in the sense that we are stripped of all that we hold on to that God wants us to let go of. It’s painful in the sense that we endure a complete transformation of who we are and what we love. We learn to love God and God alone. And in the embrace of our love of God, we come to love all people. It’s also sweet because, as we are purified, we grow infinitely closer to God and grow in holiness. This lifts the burden of sin and frees us to love as we ought. But our purification ought not to start only in Purgatory. We are all called to enter into that process of purification here and now. We are called to heed the words of John the Baptist today and repent of all that keeps us from the holiness of life. Reflect, today, upon the purification to which God may be calling you. What is it that you hold on to that He wants you free of? Commit yourself to the purifying fire of God’s love and let that love cleanse you in this Advent season.

Prayer: Lord, I do long to have my soul purified by You. I do desire the holiness of life. Help me to begin this process here and now so that I can begin to experience the joy and freedom You have in store for me. Jesus, I love You. **Amen.**

22nd December, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C

1st Reading: Micah 5:1-4A
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19
2nd Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10
Alleluia: Luke 1:38
Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Homily Theme: Blessed Are You Among Women.

Verse of the Day Reflection: The Blessed Virgin Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth after the Angel of the Lord declared to her that she would conceive of the

Holy Spirit and become the Mother of our Lord. Our Mother Mary is called Blessed. This is against the popular belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary’s significance ended after the birth of Jesus Christ. In the *Magnificat*, Mary says, ‘*From this day all generations will call me blessed*’. That is why we call her The Blessed Virgin Mary. Being the Mother of Our Lord, she is best placed to pray for us to her Son Jesus Christ. Elizabeth believed immediately that Mary is Blessed and said, ‘*And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*’ Even though Mary was her niece and quite young in age, she did not look at the age factor, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and realized that Mary was no ordinary woman, She was full of Goodness. She was so pure that she was chosen to be the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of My Lord and Saviour, pray for me, a sinner now and at the Hour of my death. Jesus, I love you. **Amen.**

29th December, 2024
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Year C

1st Reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
 or 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
 Or Psalm 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10
2nd Reading: Colossians 3:12-21
 or Colossians 3:12-17
 or 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24
Alleluia: Acts 16:14B, Colossians 3:15A, 16A
Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

Homily Theme: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Verse of the Day Reflection: On this, Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, we honor the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In honoring them, we also honor all families, big or small. And in honoring all families, we honor the family of God, the Church. But most especially, we focus in on the hidden, day-to-day life of the Holy Family of Nazareth. What was it like to live day in and day out in the household of St. Joseph? What was it like to have Jesus as a son, Mary as a wife and mother, and Joseph as a father and husband? Their home would have certainly been a sacred place and a dwelling of true peace and unity. But it would have also been so much more. The family home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph would have been, in numerous ways, just like any other home. They would have related together, talked, had fun, disagreed, worked, eaten, dealt with problems, and encountered everything else that makes up daily family life. Of course, the virtues of Jesus and Mary were perfect, and St. Joseph was a truly “just man.” Therefore, the overriding characteristic of their home would have been love. But with that said, their family would not have been exempt from the daily toil, hurt, and challenges that face most families. For example, they would have encountered the death of loved ones, St. Joseph most likely died prior to Jesus’ public ministry. They would have encountered misunderstandings and gossip from others. Our Blessed Mother, for example, was found with a child out of wedlock. This would have been a topic of discussion among many acquaintances for sure. They

would have had to fulfill all daily chores, earn a living, put food on the table, attend gatherings of family and friends, and the like. They would have lived normal family life in every way. This is significant because it reveals God's love for family life. The Father allowed His Divine Son to live this life and, as a result, elevated family life to a place within the Trinity.

The holiness of the Holy Family reveals to us that every family is invited to share in God's divine life and to encounter ordinary daily life with grace and virtue. Reflect, today, upon your own family life. Some families are strong in virtue, and some struggle with basic communication. Some are faithful day in and day out, some are broken and deeply wounded. No matter the case, know that God wants to enter more deeply into your family life just as it is right now. He desires to give you strength and virtue to live as the Holy Family. Surrender yourself and your family, this day, and invite the Triune God to make your family a holy family.

Prayer: Lord, I do offer myself to You this day and in doing so I offer You my family. I offer every relationship, be it good or difficult, and I offer every challenge we face. Please come and sanctify my family, making it holy in imitation of your family in Nazareth. Jesus, I love You. **Amen**

**5th January, 2025 -
The Epiphany of the Lord, Year C**

1st Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13
2nd Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3A, 5-6
Alleluia: Matthew 2:2
Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Homily Theme: The Epiphany of the Lord – Matthew 2:1-12

Verse of the Day Reflection: "Epiphany" means manifestation. The "Epiphany of the Lord" is Jesus' manifestation not only to these three Magi from the East, but it's also a symbolic but real manifestation of Christ to the whole world. God used what they were familiar with to call them to adore Christ. He used a star. They understood the stars and when they saw this new and unique star over Bethlehem they realized that something special was happening. So the first lesson we take from this for our own lives is that God will use what is familiar to us to call us to Himself. Look for the "star" that God is using to call you. It's closer than you may think. A second thing to note is that the Magi fell prostrate before the Christ Child. They laid their lives down before Him in complete surrender and adoration. They set a perfect example for us. If these astrologers from a foreign land could come and adore Christ in such a profound way, we must do the same. Perhaps you could try literally lying down prostrate in prayer this day, in imitation of the Magi, or at least do so in your heart through prayer. Adore Him with a complete surrender of your life. Lastly, the Magi bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These three gifts, presented to our Lord, show that they acknowledged this Child as the Divine King who would die to save us from sin. Gold is for a King, frankincense is a burnt offering to God, and myrrh is used for one who would die. Thus, their adoration is grounded in the truth of who this Child is. If we are to adore Christ properly, we must also honor Him in this threefold way.

Reflect, today, upon these Magi and see them as a symbol of what you are called to do. You are called from the foreign place of this world to seek out the Messiah. What is God using to call you to Himself? When you discover Him, do not hesitate to acknowledge the full truth of who He is, lying prostrate before Him in complete and humble submission.

Prayer: Lord, I love You and adore You. I lay my life before You and surrender all. You are my Divine King and Savior. My life is Yours. (Pray three times and then prostrate yourself before the Lord) Jesus, I trust in You. **Amen.**

**12th January, 2025
Baptism of the Lord Feast, Year C**

First Reading: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7 or Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104: 1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30
Second Reading: Titus 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7
Alleluia: Luke 3: 16
Gospel: Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

Homily Theme: Baptism of the Lord Feast

Verse of the Day Reflection: Again, this Sunday, we reflect from St. John the Baptist. He says that Jesus will come and baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire." It reveals to us the deep purification Jesus wants for our souls. For one thing, the purification of our soul hurts. But it hurts in a sweet sort of way. Turning from sin and growing closer to God requires great sacrifice and surrender. And it requires that we allow God to do powerful things within us. And the most powerful thing God wants to do is purify us.

It's also good news, because as we are purified, we grow infinitely closer to God and grow in holiness. This lifts the burden of sin and frees us to love as we ought. We are called to heed the words of John the Baptist today and repent of all that keeps us from the holiness of life. Reflect, today, upon the purification to which God may be calling you. What is it that you hold on to. Commit yourself to the to God's love and let that love cleanse you body and soul.

Prayer: Lord, I do desire the holiness of life. Help me to begin this process here and now so that I can experience the joy and freedom You have in store for me. Jesus, I love You. **Amen.**

**19th January 2025
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C**

First Reading: Isaiah 62: 1-5
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96: 1-2a, 2b-3, 7-8, 9-10
Second Reading: First Corinthians 12: 4-11
Alleluia: Second Thessalonians 2: 14
Gospel: John 2: 1-11

Homily Theme: Wedding at Cana in Galilee

Verse of the Day Reflection: This short and direct statement from our Blessed Mother says all we need to know. "Do whatever He tells you." What else do we need to know in life? The hard part, of course, is following that advice. It's easy to believe it, to preach it and to commit

ourselves to do everything that our Lord says, but it's another thing to actually follow through and fulfill His divine will.

That short exhortation calls us to two things: To discern what Jesus wants of us and, to freely embrace that which we discern. First of all, discerning the will of God can be hard in the sense that it requires wholehearted attentiveness to His gentle and subtle voice. God does not impose His will on us; rather, He respectfully and quietly invites us to listen. He waits until we give Him our full attention and then reveals His will one step at a time. Yes, some things have been made clear already through public revelation such as the avoidance of sin and the embrace of faith, hope and love. But when we are ready to let those general commands enter practically into our daily lives, we must be ready to give God our full attention. Second, we should realize that God's will, when properly discerned, is not always easy to embrace. He requires everything of us. He is a "jealous God" in the sense that He wants our total surrender. The good news is that if we are willing to give Him everything in total obedience, we will discover that our lives are completely fulfilled. Reflect, today, upon this twofold invitation spoken by our Blessed Mother. Reflect upon how ready you are to listen to God's will and how ready you are to do His will, no matter what it is. If you are ready for this, you are on the path toward holiness.

Prayer: Dear Blessed Mother, thank you for your perfect words of wisdom. Help me to accept your advice in my life. Help me to know what your Son wills of me and then help me to embrace His holy and perfect will. Lord, I give You my life and choose to surrender all to You. Jesus, I love You. Amen.

26th January 2025

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

First Reading: Nehemiah 8: 2-4a, 5-6, 8-10
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 19: 8, 9, 10, 15
Second Reading: First Corinthians 12: 12-30
 or First Corinthians 12: 12-14, 27
Alleluia: Luke 4: 18
Gospel: Luke 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21

Homily Theme: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

Verse of the Day Reflection: Jesus had just arrived in Nazareth, where He had grown up, and entered the Temple area to read the Scripture. He read the passage from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." After reading this, He sat down and proclaimed that this prophecy from Isaiah was fulfilled. The reaction from the people of His town is interesting. They "all spoke highly of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His mouth." At least, this is the initial reaction.

But if we read on we see that Jesus challenges the people and, as a result, they were filled with fury and tried to kill Him then and there. Oftentimes, we have the same reactions to Jesus. At first, we may speak well of Him and graciously receive Him. For example, at Christmas, we may sing carols and celebrate His birthday with joy and festivities. We may go to church and wish people a merry Christmas. We may set up a manger scene and decorate it with Christian symbols of our faith. But how deep is all of this? Sometimes Christmas celebrations and traditions are only superficial and do not reveal any true depth of Christian conviction or faith. What happens when this precious Christ-Child speaks words of truth and conviction? What happens when the Gospel calls us to repentance and conversion? What is our reaction to Christ in these moments? As we continue the final week of our Christmas season, reflect, today, upon the fact that the little Child we honour at Christmas has grown up and now speaks words of truth to us. Reflect upon whether or not you are willing to honour Him not only as an infant but also as the Prophet of all Truth. Are you willing to allow His words of Truth to penetrate your heart and transform your life?

Prayer: Lord, I love You and desire that all You have spoken would penetrate my heart and draw me into all truth. Help me to accept You not only as a little child born in Bethlehem but also as the great Prophet of Truth. May I never be offended by the words You speak, and may I always be open to Your prophetic role in my life. Jesus, I love You. Amen



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The Advent Wreath



When Christianity came, people continued from the old tradition by making wreaths and lighting candles to celebrate the Advent hope in Christ. By the 16th century, both Catholics and Protestants were making Advent wreaths, and the custom has since spread to many parts of the world. The wreath symbolises truths of Jewish and Christian tradition. The circle without beginning or end suggests the God who was, who is, and who will be for ever. The greenery suggests life. The lighting of the candles - one the first week, two in the second week, and so on - suggests the gradual unfolding of God's saving plan for mankind. A good time for the family to pray by the Advent wreath is just before the evening meal.

Here are simple prayers you might like to use. Also as well you may prefer to use your own words.

Blessing the wreath

O GOD, by whose Word all things are made holy, bless this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. Amen.

First week: one purple candle is lit

GOD of Abraham and Sarah, and all the patriarchs of old, you are our Father, too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth to make our hearts ready for your Holy Spirit to make his home among us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light that is coming into the world. LORD Jesus, Light of the world, born in David's city of Jerusalem, born like him to be a King, be born in our hearts this Christmas, and be born in our hearts today. *Suggested readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Isaiah 11:1-10. Matthew 1:18-24. Luke 1:26-38.*

Second week: two purple candles are lit

GOD our Father, you spoke to the prophets of a Saviour who would bring everlasting peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of his coming kingdom. Help us, as we prepare to celebrate our Saviour's birth, to share with those around us the good news of your power and love. We ask this through Jesus the Lord, the Light who is coming into the world. LORD Jesus, Light of the world, the prophets said you

would bring peace and save your people in trouble. Give peace to our hearts at Christmas time and show all the world God's love. *Suggested readings: Isaiah 2:1-5. Micah 5:2. Matthew 2: 1-2, 9-11, Matthew 3:1-6.*

Third week: two purple candles and the pink candle are lit.

GOD our Father, you gave to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age a son called John. He grew up strong in spirit, prepared the people for the coming of the Lord, and baptized them in the River Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us who have been baptised into Christ to be ready to welcome him in our hearts, and to grow strong in faith by the power of the Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light who is coming into the world. LORD Jesus, Light of the world, John told the people to prepare, for you were very near. As Christmas grows closer day by day, help us to be ready to welcome you now. *Suggested readings: Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:18-25. Luke 1:5-17*

Fourth week: all four candles are lit

GOD our Father, the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she was to be the Mother of your Son. Mary was afraid, but she responded to your call with joy. Help us whom you have called to serve you to share like Mary in your great work of bringing to our world your love and healing. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Light who is coming into the world. JESUS Christ, Light of the world, blessed is Gabriel who brought good news; and blessed is Mary, your Mother and ours. Bless your Church preparing for Christmas, and bless us your children who long for your coming. *Suggested readings: Isaiah 52:7-10. Malachi 3:1-5. Romans 8:18-25. Revelation 21:1-4.*

How to make an Advent wreath

YOU need four candles, candleholders and some greenery – real or artificial. Living foliage looks best, but it will wither and have to be replaced from time to time. If you use artificial foliage (easily obtainable in supermarkets) make sure that it is non-flammable.

Traditionally, three of the candles are purple or dark blue, and one is pink. But if you can't find these colours, any candles may be used. Some wreaths have an additional white or gold candle at the middle, which is lit on Christmas Eve.

Warning: Do not allow candles to burn down into the base of the candle-holders on the wreath. Do not allow children to play with the wreath. Candles should never be placed near curtains or anything that catches light easily. Candles should not be left alight in an empty room.

Advent Antiphons

The Great Advent Antiphons come from the Old Testament. They reflect the Hebrew people's yearning for the coming of the Messiah. For us, they are a call for Christ to come among us.

Since the 7th century, as Advent draws to a close, the Great Advent Antiphons have been recited daily at Evening Prayer before and after the Song of Mary (the *Magnificat*).

Each antiphon addresses God with a Biblical name, and concludes with a call for the coming of the Saviour. The antiphons feature in the hymn, 'O come, O come, Emmanuel'.

In the days leading up to Christmas, why not use the Great Advent Antiphons in your private prayers?

17th December *O Sapientia*

O WISDOM, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth.

O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi produisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter, suaviterque disponens omnia. Veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 24:1-9. 1 Corinthians 1:1-13

18th December *O Adonai*

O ADONAI and Leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and on Sinai gave him the Law: come to redeem us with outstretched arm.

O Adonai et Dux Domus Israel, qui Moyse in igne flammae rubi apparuisti et ei Sina Legem dedisti: veni ad reimendum nos in brachio extento.

Readings: Exodus 3:1-6. Acts 7:20-36

19th December *O Radix*

O ROOT of Jesse, you stand as a sign for the people. Kings stand silent before you, whom the nations will worship. Come to set us free, and do not delay.

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, sine quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: veni et liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10. Romans 15:7-13

20th December *O Clavis*

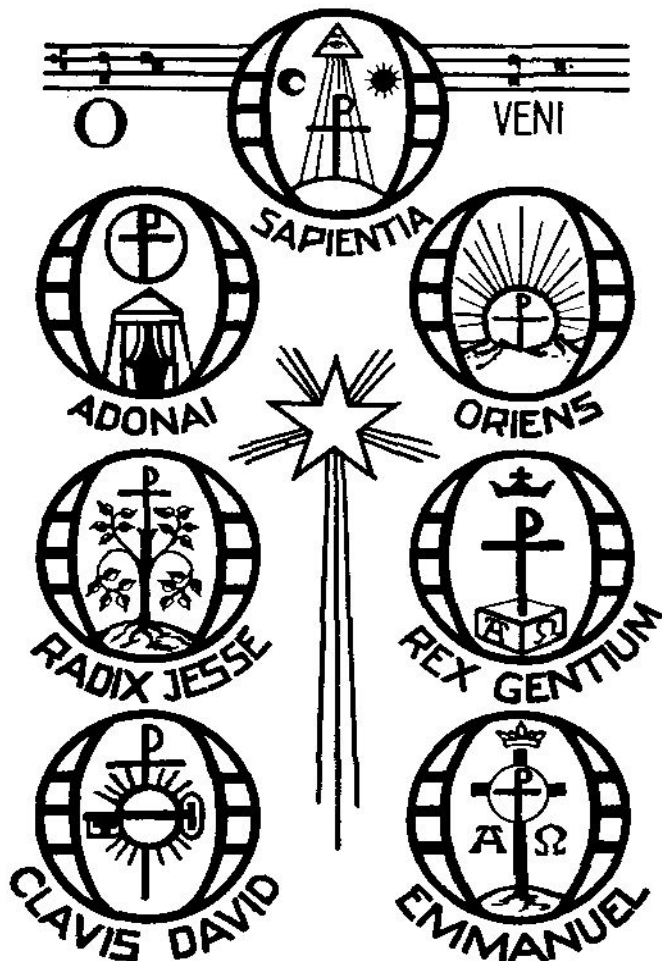
O KEY of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel, what you open, no one can close; and what you close, no one can open. Come to lead the captive from prison, seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Clavis David et Sceptrum Domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit; claudis et nemo aperuit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

Readings: Isaiah 22:20-33. Revelation 3:7-13

21st December *O Oriens*

O RISING SUN, splendour of eternal light and Sun of Justice: come and shine on those seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.



O ORIENS, splendor lux aeternae et sol justitiae: veni et illumine sedentes in tenebris et et umbra mortis.

Readings: Numbers 24:15b-19. Revelation 22:10-21

22nd December *O Rex*

O KING of the Nations, whom all the people desire: you are the Keystone which makes all one. Come and save mankind whom you formed from clay.

O REX gentium, et desideratus earum, lapsique angularis qui facis utroque unum: veni et salva hominem qui tu limo formasti.

Readings: Jeremiah 30:7-11a. Acts 4:1-12

23rd December *O Emmanuel*

O EMMANUEL, our King and our Judge, the One awaited by the gentiles, and their Saviour: Come and save us, Lord our God

O Emmanuel, Rex et Legifer noster, exspectatio gentium at Salvator arum: veni et salvandum nos, Domine Deus noster.

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14. Matthew 1:18-23.

Lord Jesus, teach us the way of truth and set us free



INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

by Rev. Fr. Gabou Secka

CONTINUED FROM OCTOBER / NOVEMBER

MARK'S SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The value of any man's story will depend on the sources of his information. Where, then, did Mark get his information about the life and work of Jesus? We have seen that his home was from the beginning a Christian centre of Jerusalem. Many a time he must have heard people tell of their personal memories of Jesus. But it is most likely that he had a source of information without a superior.

Towards the end of the second century there was a man called Papias who liked to obtain and transmit such information as he could glean about the early days of the Church. He tells us that Mark's gospel is nothing other than a record of the preaching material of Peter, the greatest of the apostles. Certainly Mark stood so close to Peter, and so near to his heart, that Peter could call him "Mark, my son." (1 Peter 5:13.) Here is what Papias says: "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of his. He followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instruction to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically. So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his one concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything that he had heard."

We may then take it that in his gospel we have what Mark remembered of the preaching material of Peter himself.

So, then, we have two great reasons why Mark is a book of supreme importance. First, it is the earliest of all the gospels; if it was written just shortly after Peter died its date will be about A.D. 65. Second, it embodies the record of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus; we may put it this way—Mark is the nearest approach we will ever possess to an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus.

THE LOST ENDING

There is a very interesting thing about Mark's gospel. In its original form it stops at Mark 16:8. We know that for two reasons. First, the verses which follow (Mark 16:9–20) are not in any of the great early manuscripts; only later and inferior manuscripts contain them. Second, the style of the Greek is so different that they cannot have been written by the same person as wrote the rest of the gospel.

But the gospel cannot have been *meant* to stop at Mark 16:8. What then happened? It may be that Mark died, perhaps even suffered martyrdom, before he could complete his gospel. More likely, it may be that at one time



only one copy of the gospel remained, and that a copy in which the last part of the roll on which it was written had got torn off. There was a time when the church did not much use Mark, preferring Matthew and Luke. It may well be that Mark's gospel was so neglected that all copies except for a mutilated one were lost. If that is so we were within an ace of losing the gospel which in many ways is the most important of all.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Let us look at the characteristics of Mark's gospel so that we may watch for them as we read and study it.

(i) It is the nearest thing we will ever get to a report of Jesus' life. Mark's aim was to give a picture of Jesus as he was. Westcott called it "a transcript from life." A. B. Bruce said that it was written "from the viewpoint of loving, vivid recollection," and that its great characteristic was *realism*.

If ever we are to get anything approaching a biography of Jesus, it must be based on Mark, for it is his delight to tell the facts of Jesus' life in the simplest and most dramatic way.

(ii) Mark never forgot the divine side of Jesus. He begins his gospel with the declaration of faith, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He leaves us in no doubt what he believed Jesus to be. Again and again he speaks of the impact Jesus made on the mind and heart of those who heard him. The awe and astonishment which he evoked are always before Mark's mind. "They were astonished at his teaching." (1:22.) "They were all amazed." (1:27.) Such phrases occur again and again. Not only was this astonishment in the minds of the crowds who listened to Jesus; it was still more in the minds of the inner circle of the disciples. "And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" (4:41.) "And they were utterly astounded." (6:51.) "The disciples were amazed at his words." (10:24, 26.)

To Mark, Jesus was not simply a man among men; he was God among men, ever moving them to a wondering amazement with his words and deeds.