



Beloved

DAILY ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
REFLECTIONS 2015

This is a gift to

Beloved

May you know yourself

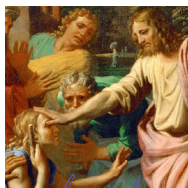
as beloved of God

this Christmas

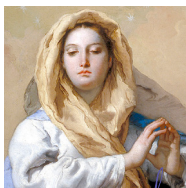
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Beloved

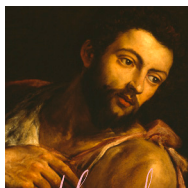
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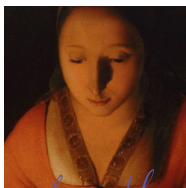
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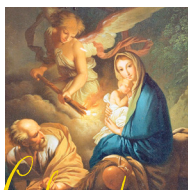
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Epiphany
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The Immaculate Conception

GIOVANNI BATTISTA TIEPOLO (1696-1770)

Tiepolo, Giovanni Battista; 1696–1770. “The Immaculate Conception”. 1767/69.
Oil on canvas, 279 × 152cm. (Painted for the church of St. Pascual d’Aranjuez).
Cat. 363. Madrid, Museo del Prado

Week Two of Advent features the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. This year, it significantly ushers in the *Jubilee Year of Mercy*, proclaimed by Pope Francis. For a thousand years Christians have called on Mary as Mother of Mercy. She is merciful towards us because she is so conscious of God’s mercy towards her.

While her face is strong in Tiepolo’s painting, it is also supremely calm and her hands in prayer depict her humility and her gratitude at God’s looking upon her lowliness. Tiepolo has taken his inspiration for this painting from St John’s vision in the Apocalypse of a woman adorned with the sun (it seems to be breaking through the clouds and illuminating the figure of Mary), standing on the moon, and crowned with stars. The angry serpent still clutches the apple which Mary refused to eat. His failure is doubly emphasised by the cherub piercing his tail with the lily signifying Mary’s purity and the palm tree hinting Mary’s crucial role in the victory achieved by her Son. Above Mary’s head is the Holy Spirit. She is conscious that she owes everything to God.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo comes from 18th Century Venice. He is one of the last great painters of sacred art who painted in the Baroque tradition. Tiepolo is noted for giving his paintings a lightness and airiness that did not exist in those works by artists who worked in the previous century.

FR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

The Lord has done
great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

***R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.***

When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,
it seemed like a dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
on our lips there were songs. **R.**

The heathens themselves said:

“What marvels the Lord worked for them!”

What marvels the Lord worked for us!

Indeed we were glad. **R.**

Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage
as streams in dry land.

Those who are sowing in tears
will sing when they reap. **R.**

They go out, they go out, full of tears
carrying seed for the sowing:

they come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves. **R.**



LISTEN TO

Track 6 – *Great Things*

on *Cry Out* which can be purchased
at www.advent.dow.org.au

Who built his house on sand. MT 7:26

Before I was a priest, I was first a carpenter and then a structural engineer. Jesus is right from an engineering perspective when he describes the house built on sand being destroyed by rain and floods. An interesting quality of sand as a foundation is that it is relatively strong in supporting weight. In fact, well compacted sand can be stronger than some types of rock in its ability to support weight. The weakness of sand though is its inability to withstand erosion from the elements, particularly water. A small trickle of water in the wrong place, draining through a building's foundation, can bring down the whole structure. Rock, however, is largely unaffected.

If the foundation Jesus speaks of is the foundation of our own lives then we need to be careful. At first glance, foundations built on sand, worldly foundations, can seem strong. In addition, foundations on sand close to the surface are easy to build upon. However, the smallest trickle of water, perhaps even the trickle of water in baptism, in just the right spot, can reveal the weakness and vulnerability of the entire house.

Sometimes it's hard work to dig down to good foundations before we build a house, but know that it's worth it. Because a house built on poor foundations – foundations that can easily be eroded, like sand – is worth nothing.

Jesus, show me the spots in my foundations that are easily eroded. Amen.

FR STEPHEN VARNEY

And the Power of the Lord was behind his works of healing. LK 5:17

Often when we encounter something difficult in our life, we seek to protect ourselves from being hurt again. However, over time we potentially begin to build a roof over our hearts that limits our response to God's love. Tiles of fear, rejection, or doubt are put in place. With these things in place, our hearts can become paralysed.

The Good News is just like the men in Luke's Gospel who stopped at nothing to reach Jesus. Christ does the same for us. Chipping away, tile by tile, he exposes the paralysis of our hearts and calls us forth to freedom and reconciliation. If we ask Jesus to reveal to us the sources of paralysis in our life, he will begin work immediately to release us into a life of freedom. Christ wants to heal us and came for the very reason of liberating us. This is our hope.

Secondly, we know that forgiveness and healing go hand in hand. The most prominent sign of this unifying grace is peace. We know too the peace Christ gives is not of this world, so we can be sure of its distinctiveness. This is his guiding gift to us.

Finally, after each healing encounter with Christ, we are inspired to praise with actions and words. When we praise, it is an act of expressing and strengthening our belief in something. It breathes life into our relationship and is a source of strength and courage. *This* is our joy. This week we will see the "Power of the Lord" break through into our lives.

Search my heart O God, breathe new life into my being. By the Power of the Lord release me from all that holds me captive that I might live a life of loving praise in word and deed. Amen.

TRISH McCARTHY

19 DECEMBER 2015

*Saturday of the third week
of Advent*

Judges 13:2-7. 24-25

Psalm 70:3-6. 16-17

Luke 1:5-25

**He will be your joy and delight and many will
rejoice at his birth.** LK 1:14

“My dear friend Michael, I am happy to tell you that I have become a father for the second time. About four hours ago little Emil, our son, was born! He came very fast and unexpectedly but thank God everything is fine. Maria did a great job with her water birth. Incredibly, the whole thing lasted about one hour. Thanks for your prayers! Greetings from a happy family, Brano.”

This thrilling message was cyber-spaced to my phone recently by a beloved friend as I raced through Sydney's chaotic streets to meet a deadline. On receiving this news I stopped in my tracks to email an excited response to my Slovak friends in Belgium. I welcomed Emil to our planet and rejoiced that his sister, Julia, had a baby brother with whom to play!

Why not pause awhile yourself to ponder a time when you received joyful news about the birth of a child. Take time as well to empathise with Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary at the excitement they felt when the births of John the Baptist, and his baby cousin, Jesus, were announced. “O Lord, who are my hope; on you I have leaned from my birth, from my mother's womb you have been my help.”

Through the intercession of the extended Holy Family, let us pray that we can always trust that nothing is impossible to God. When we doubt, feel barren and/or feel too old, let us trust that we too can conceive and bear fruit unexpectedly! Amen.

DEACON MICHAEL DYER

26 DECEMBER 2015

Saint Stephen

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59

Psalm 30:3-4. 6. 8. 16-17

Matthew 10:17-22

They could not get the better of him ... because it was the Spirit that prompted what he said. ACTS 6:10

This feast of St Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is a curious one to celebrate immediately after the birth of Jesus. There seems not much to connect them except the Christmas carol about *Good King Wenceslaus*. It really fast-forwards us to the end of Jesus' story when the apostles and disciples had to pick up Jesus' ministry and endure, as well, the antagonism of those who felt threatened by Jesus' message.

As part of the day after Christmas day, as we reflect on our family celebration and how it went, each of us can also reflect on just how far the new age that dawned with the birth of Jesus has become a reality in our lives. If it has, we will surely also find ourselves at odds with certain aspects of our prevailing culture which will challenge us to pick and choose the true "beautiful and good" and reject those merely self-indulgent and hedonistic aspects which undermine our integrity and are divisive and destructive in families and communities. Even during our holiday season, the light of the grace of our new life can shine in us. We will be challenged, but as the account of St Stephen's martyrdom illustrates, "the Spirit" of our "Father will be speaking in us", just as Jesus promised us. Just as the Spirit was with Stephen, this will cost us and will challenge us to have courage and faith.

May we, as we enjoy all the good things of life provided by our Father, also have our inner eye raised like Stephen to the "Son of Man" who has gone ahead of us and now stands "at the right hand of God".

Lord, thank you for the joy of being Christian. Amen.

SR ANNE MARIE JOYCE o.s.c.

30 DECEMBER 2015

*Sixth day in the octave
of Christmas*

1 John 2:12-17

Psalm 95:7-10

Luke 2:36-40

Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom, and God's favour was with him. LK 2:52

St Luke, in the space of a few verses, transfers his infancy narrative from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Luke combines the two Mosaic practices, the Presentation of the child Jesus and the Purification of Mary his mother. Luke writes his Gospel as that great journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus will accomplish his saving mission. The aged Simeon, who in yesterday's Gospel proclaimed his *Nunc Dimittis*, his prayer of resignation, and the prophetess Anna, feature in the infancy of Jesus as the *Anawim* – the poor and faithful ones, very precious people in the Gospel of Luke. They recognised and greeted the infant who had been the focus of their longing.

In an age when there is much focus on youth in the mission of the Church, the appearance of Simeon and Anna has a significant message for us. Yes, they are the aged and faithful ones. The seniors of our parishes are integral to the life of the Church. Modern housing estates tend to accentuate age with a corresponding segregation in planning. Reflective sociologists suggest that we need three generations intermingling to have genuinely wholistic communities. It is always a great delight so often to have four generations present at baptisms. Another great feature of the modern day parish and our schools is the prominence given to *Grandparents' Day*. This is a worthy acknowledgement of the wisdom, the sacrifices and the faith of those on whose shoulders we stand.

Lord Jesus, give faith to those who live in doubt, and hope to those who live in fear. Amen.

FR PATRICK FAHERTY

9 JANUARY 2016

Saturday after the Epiphany

1 John 5:14-21

Psalm 149:1-6

John 3:22-30

**He must grow greater,
I must grow smaller.** JN 30

What is it that most people want? Usually it is happiness, love, peace, security, wellbeing and some will say that they want this most of all for their children and for those they love. How is this achieved?

John gives us the answer, and what a hard saying this seems to be! Yet, it holds a time-honoured truth borne out in the lives of saints and so many utterly good people. If you want what is best in life, you have to grow less. You have to lose yourself. You actually have to get out of your own road. You have to make choices that make the lives of others better, not your own. You have to do what Jesus did, and give up your life.

And how can that happen? Very easily. It happens when we make God bigger in our lives, and that is not hard. We simply need to pay more attention to him, give time to him, talk to him, and surround ourselves with the things that remind us of him. Then almost by osmosis, we begin to change. There is now room in our lives for what really matters, and we can see it.

Here is a further tip. Every day do something you would rather not do. Go against yourself in some very small way (it will all add up) and follow it with this little prayer:

In this I open the door of my heart to you. Amen.

Imagine what would happen if all the world grew less and God grew more.

SR HILDA SCOTT OSB